

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 29, 2011

Acts 17:22-31

Psalm 66:7-18

1 Peter 3:13-22

John 14:15-21

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The words of this morning's Gospel are words of comfort, dealing with what we would call separation anxiety.

That is the state of mind of Jesus' disciples.

Jesus' arrest, trial and execution had been horribly traumatic for them but quick; the disciples had no time beforehand to agonize over the thought of losing Him.

This is different. Jesus has been telling them for some time that He's leaving, preparing them for the moment when He will ascend to the Father; even the most obtuse disciple must have caught on at this point.

What is the obvious question in the mind of every one of the disciples? Spoken or unspoken, they are thinking, "Now what; what about us?"

They are thinking that, theoretically it's just fine to give me a few weeks of instruction on being an apostle, a missionary, and an evangelist, but it's a little much to expect me to actually go out and

be one, actually go out and tell perfect strangers about Jesus and the Resurrection.

They are thinking, “What if I fail? What if people don’t like me, ignore me, laugh at me?”

You remember, of course, that is exactly what happens to Paul a few years later. He’s done pretty well preaching the Gospel to some pretty rustic crowds until now; now he’s in Athens at the Areopagus speaking to a pickup crowd of sophisticated Athenians. They are amused. They tell him, “We’ll hear more about this,” but of course they mean, “Don’t call us, we’ll call you.” You can hear the smothered laughter.

All of which takes us back to the disciples. They are thinking “People might throw a few stones at me, but at least that would show they are taking me seriously, although stones and laughter and being ignored all hurt. So, I think I’ll just stay in this nice, cozy, safe upper room; it’s calm here.”

Does any of that sound familiar? Have you escaped the dry mouth, the pounding heart, the shaking hands and the shortness of breath, all at the moment when you have been called to step forward, to make the leap of faith and courage to do something beyond yourself?

Long, long ago, in a church far, far away, the first time I served as a chalice administrator, I was halfway from the altar to the rail when it struck me that I was carrying a cup containing the blood of Christ. There were whitecaps in the chalice.

What got me through that moment of shaky panic? What gets us all beyond those times, outside ourselves so that we can be apostles, so that we can speak, by word and example, the Good News of God in Christ, speak it even to a world that doesn’t know what it’s missing?

It must be the Advocate or Comforter or Holy Spirit that is the continuing presence of Christ in our lives. Jesus promised the disciples and promises us that it will be so, that He will never leave them, or leave us alone. Is that not what we all need in the times of stress, the knowledge that we have someone, that we have one who has boundless knowledge of what stress means, Jesus, to be with us as we muddle through?

In His Holy Name.