

Commentary to the Third Sunday of Easter -A-



Last weekend was amazing. The world's attention was focused on the canonizations of Pope St. John XXIII and Pope St. John Paul II. Hundreds of thousands attended the celebration. Millions more watched it on television. Its true significance was not the canonizations themselves. Its significance is that they pointed to the central event in the history of mankind. They pointed to the Christ event, the coming of the Eternal Word of God as one of us, as man; His proclamation of the new spiritual Kingdom of God; His destruction of evil and death through the sacrificial love of the cross; His giving His Life to us at the Resurrection and at our personal acceptance of this Life, our Baptism; and the continuation of His power and presence through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Christ event is the central event of mankind. All meaningful history before it pointed to this event. All history after it takes its meaning from this event. Jesus Christ is the center of history. He is our center. We are part of His Life, and He is our life.

Regarding Pope St. John Paul II, George Weigel mentioned that people were drawn to this pope because he called all to radical holiness. He called us to be completely committed to Jesus Christ. And we said, "Yes, I want this. With God's help, I can do this. I can live for the Lord." We had the blessing here a few years ago of hearing the story of one young man who heard the pope and allowed Christ to transform his life. You might remember that a few summers ago we were blessed to have a

seminarian here named Dayan Machado, Dayan was a teen in Cuba forced to be a member of the Castro Youth Army. They made him learn how to use a machine gun when he was only 13 or 14. Then Pope John Paul II came to Cuba. It was January of 1998. Dayan had never been baptized, in fact he had never been part of any religion. He had no idea of what a Catholic was or a pope was or who John Paul II was. He had barely heard of Jesus Christ. But someone turned on a little TV in the huge mess hall where the Teens were eating. Dayan heard the Pope call young people to transform the world to a place of love by following Jesus Christ. He made up his mind to do what this Pope person was telling him to do. His family had applied to immigrate to the United States. Dayan became a Catholic as soon as he arrived in Tampa. He is now a priest at St. Clement's Parish in Plant City. Fr. Machado's story is one of tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands who have allowed Christ to change their lives after hearing Pope St. John Paul II call us to radical holiness.

I myself have always felt a deep devotion to St. John XXIII. This happy pope was totally committed to the Lord. He began each day with a personal motto: Now I begin. Pope St. John XXIII calls me to start new each day anew for the Lord.

The importance of the canonizations of Pope St. John XXIII, and Pope St. John Paul II was that it pointed towards Jesus Christ. We humans were transformed by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We were given spiritual lives. Now we are called to be part of the great event. We are called to be witnesses to the world that Jesus Christ lives among us and within us. We need to call the world to accept Christ and find God.

Those disciples on the road to Emmaus in today's Gospel reading, did not understand the significance of Jesus Christ as they walked down that road. They were upset over what had happened in Jerusalem that weekend. They had been followers of Jesus of Nazareth, and had thought that he would be the one who would redeem Israel. To them, that meant freeing Israel from the Romans. But, Jesus was killed the Friday before. Then there was a strange report that He had risen from the dead. They had to take a step out of the everyday affairs of human history and a step into the infinite. Jesus walked with them on that road. They did not recognize him because they were looking at him with physical eyes. He would establish a spiritual relationship with them. Then they would know who He was. He explained the Word of God, Scripture to them. The One that Israel longed for was the One the entire world longed for. Scripture said that death could not have a hold on Him. Furthermore, those who followed him would also share in His Eternal Life. They invited Him into their home and He broke bread and gave it to them. Then they realized that their hearts were burning as He explained scripture. And they recognized Him in the breaking of bread, the Eucharist. He had led them into the spiritual.

In the first reading for this Sunday, Peter stands with the other apostles and tells the Jewish people that he and the others were witnesses to the resurrection of the Lord and recipients of the out-pouring of the

Holy Spirit. We also are called to continue this witness, this apostolic witness in the world. There are many like Dayan who are searching for the Lord without even knowing why they feel an emptiness in their lives. They need us to fill them with Christ. We can do this. Actually, God can do this through us. There are many times that we also feel empty. But then we are given the grace to return to our core, our center, return to Jesus Christ and embrace His Life and Love. We must be committed to Christ.

Radical holiness means giving our entire lives to the Lord. Radical holiness means being apostles in a world longing for meaning. Radical holiness means being so full of the Love of Christ that His love overflows from us to those who are searching for Him. We are called to be apostles. The world has been transformed. We are part of that transformation. We are part of the Christ event.

Last weekend was amazing. The entire world was captivated. The true significance of the canonizations was that they focused our attention on the greatest event of mankind. And this event, the Christ event, is forever. For Jesus Christ has made a promise to us. He will be true to His promise. His promise is this: He will be with us always.

And we are witnesses to Jesus Christ.

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