

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Jun 2nd 2014

At least part of today's gospel will surely resonate with us: "In the world you will have trouble" Indeed! But this is followed by a challenge: "but take courage, I have conquered the world." Take courage. Like medicine? I have a friend who says "take a brave pill" as a metaphor for mustering the confidence to do something formidable. Trouble surely tests our constitution. What are we made of? How do we get this courage we need? And will it be there when we need it most?

Today's gospel reading from John is part of a more extensive narrative in which Jesus tells his disciples of his impending departure and the sending of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus begins to unpack the Trinity for them (something that would later require many, many pages for theologians to explain), the disciples profess to understand Jesus. But Jesus knows them better than they know themselves. Sometimes genuine understanding requires more experience. With struggle, anguish, and suffering, we come to understand more profoundly that which we may have thought we already knew.

We have just gone through a season of graduation exercises, as young people pass from one level of education to begin another stage of life. We who have passed further in our journeys look at these young ones and smile at their bravado. We laugh as we see ourselves, how much we "knew" at that age and how much we had to grow as we encountered the world for ourselves and learned from our experiences.

Human beings are not always so quick on the uptake. The reading from Acts states that Paul "entered the synagogue, and for three months debated boldly with persuasive arguments about the Kingdom of God." Paul had courage, but he also needed patience and persistence to debate for three months, I am sure. This is like a semester's worth of work for Paul. He probably needed a break. Maybe even a sabbatical!

I would like to say that I am clever enough to understand what Jesus is teaching the disciples. We have the benefit of knowing the rest of the story, which was yet to unfold for them. We know that Jesus conquered death. And we also have the faithful witness through the ages from those who have followed Jesus, whose lives display the work of the Holy Spirit in action. But there is still much learning to do as we figure out what following Jesus will mean, and how to cooperate in the work of the Spirit.

Connectedness to all of those who have followed our Lord is a source of great strength and wisdom, too. Over the ages, the lives of the faithful have stored up treasure that is passed on to posterity. Each of us has a special giftedness for living out the work of the Spirit, which may indeed be passed on to others. Trouble may indeed bring out that giftedness. So, struggle, we must. Take courage. We are

part of something alive and dynamic as we follow Jesus, receiving the faith passed on to us, and in turn passing it along to others, hopefully with greater richness and deeper understanding. Thanks be to God.

Ed Morse