

The Third Sunday of Easter

(Year A)

<i>First Reading</i>	Acts 2:14, 22-33
<i>Response</i>	Thou dost show me the path of life
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11
<i>Second Reading</i>	1 Peter 1:17-21
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?
<i>Gospel</i>	Luke 24:13-35

The Third Sunday of Easter's second reading today continues our journey through the First Letter of Peter, through one of the Catholic Epistles, and here we're looking at First Peter 1:17-21. It is a very beautiful text, so much of First Peter is so beautiful, and actually one I think is very relevant for the Church today. So I'll try to show you how that's the case. Let's read it together. Verse 17 says this:

...if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake. Through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.¹

A few aspects of this passage are worth highlighting. Number one, notice that Peter, like Paul and Jesus, affirms that the final judgment will be according to deeds, very important point. In other videos, we've given attention to Paul's teaching that justification, initial justification, takes place through faith, apart from

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

works of the law or any deeds that we might perform. Nothing earns the initial grace of salvation. At the same time, Jesus in Matthew 7, in the Sermon on the Mount, as well as Paul in Romans 2, and Peter here in 1 Peter 1, all agree, the New Testament teaching is consistent, that the final judgment is going to be according to deeds. And so Peter is reminding the recipients of the letter of that so that they might conduct themselves with, as he puts it, fear throughout the time of their exile.

Now, the fear here that Peter is describing is a very Jewish concept. It doesn't mean being terrified of God or afraid of God in the sense that you are constantly anxious about whatever malicious deed you think He might do to you. It's the kind of fear and awe and reverence that you see in the Old Testament, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom means that honoring God's commandments through fear of the negative consequences that will come from disobedience, right? And the negative consequences that come from sin is the beginning of wisdom. If God gives a command and He tells you, keep this commandment and you'll have life, then to fear the consequences of breaking that commandment is just a rational, reasonable response to the One who made the universe and who made us. Okay? So Peter here is using the language of fear, meaning the reverence for God throughout the time of exile. I'll come back to the time of exile language in just a minute.

Another point that he mentions here is the language of the redemption. Notice he describes the salvation that is won for us in Christ as being:

ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

So here what First Peter is doing is describing salvation in terms of a new Exodus. We've seen this theme elsewhere. So the blood of Christ that's shed on Calvary is not just the blood of a man unjustly sentenced to death by Roman institution in a Roman execution, but rather it's the blood, the sacrificial blood, the atoning blood of a lamb, right? Christ, the Lamb of God, who as John the Baptist says in the Gospel of John, who takes away the sins of the world. So the image of an

unblemished lamb that is sacrificed in order to bring about a redemption is an echo of the exodus from Egypt. In Exodus 12, whenever God is giving the people commands on how to perform the Passover sacrifice so that they might be set free from Egypt, He's going to tell them to take a male lamb, one year old, unblemished. So it can't have any blemishes on it, not just because God wants the people of Israel to give them His best, sorry to give Him their best, but because each and every one of those lambs that's sacrificed in Exodus 12 in the Passover, is a type, it's a pre-configuration, it points forward to the ultimate lamb, the one lamb, the true lamb who will be sacrificed for the redemption of the world. Therefore, it's fitting that the Old Testament lambs that prefigure Christ the Lamb would be unblemished just as He Himself will be without sin. So it's a typological understanding of the Exodus that's going to permeate the entire First Letter of Peter.

Another aspect of the passage that's interesting is Peter's declaration that Christ was destined before the foundation of the world to be savior, to be the lamb without blemish or spot. Now, this language of destination is, again, going to be something we see in the writings of Paul. The foreordination or the predestination of both the people of God to salvation, but also of Christ as savior of the world. This goes to show that part of the early apostolic preaching that you see reflected in the letters of Paul and in the letters of Peter is that the plan of salvation that is carried out in their own day, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, is something that God has known about, that God has foreordained from all eternity, from before the foundation of the world. It's an eternal plan of redemption, an eternal plan of salvation, but it's only made manifest at the end of times.

So this is interesting that in First Peter, what we see here is the reflection of the early apostolic teaching that we are living in the end times now. In other words, the coming of Christ, the incarnation, and then the passion, death and resurrection of Christ, inaugurated the end times, the *eschaton* is the Greek word there. So that if...sometimes people will say, do you think we're living in the end times? I always say, "Well, absolutely yes." In fact, we are living in the end times and we have been living in the end times since the first century AD because that's what the apostles teach. That Christ, in a sense, brought about a revolution, a turning of the wheel of time, so to speak, from the old age to the last age, from the old covenant

to the new covenant, from the age of the old dispensation under Israel to the new dispensation of the church, which is the last age of the world before the final consummation. So Peter here is reflecting an early Christian eschatology that makes clear that, no, no, no, Jesus Himself has inaugurated the end times and we are heading toward the consummation of that final age. And therefore, all of the things you see in the Old Testament are prefigurations of this eschatological age in which we currently live and which Christ inaugurated. Sometimes scholars will talk about inaugurated eschatology, meaning the end times have already begun, but they're not yet fully consummated as Jesus will say in Mark 13 or Matthew 24, these are the beginning of the birth pangs, but the end is not yet. We're still in that age between the death of Christ and then the final parousia of the Son of Man in glory. So it's a very eschatological letter of First Peter.

And then finally, notice another aspect here is the importance of faith. So it's not just Paul who talks, says that we will be judged according to works. It's Peter who says it in First Peter. And it's not just Paul who talks about the importance of faith in Romans, it's also Peter in First Peter 1:21. It says:

Through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

So we see there are two of the theological virtues, faith and hope, that we also find in the Pauline Corpus. So why am I pointing out all these parallels with Paul and with John? Well, part of the reason is to show you that although if you read the letters of Peter or the letters of Paul or the letters of John, they're going to be very different in their tone and their style and even some of their vocabulary. If you look at the doctrine, if you look at the basic teachings, they share a common apostolic preaching, which of course goes back to Jesus Himself.

All right, so that's just a little basic overview of First Peter. Now I want to highlight this theme that I skipped over, but is really crucial, and that's the theme of exile. Did you see that? Go back to verse 17. He says, I want you to:

conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.

Now, what's Peter talking about here? What exile is he referring to? Well, if you read the Old Testament, especially the books of Kings, you'll learn about the two exiles of Israel. So you have the Assyrian exile that takes place in 722 BC, when the 10 northern tribes are scattered to the four winds by the Assyrian empire among the Gentiles, and then a few hundred years later, in 586 BC, you have the famous, more famous Babylonian exile, which takes place when the two southern tribes are...the two remaining tribes of Judah and Benjamin, are also brought into exile by Babylon, by the Babylonian empire, and the temple's destroyed. Now after that Babylonian exile ends, some of the people of Judah come back to the promised land and they rebuild the temple. But there's still this expectation, realization I should say, that the majority of the 12 tribes are still scattered and mixed among the Gentiles. Okay? They're lost. This is the origin of the lost tribes of Israel. And this is going to become a particularly palpable reality, especially in the first century, because at the time of the Roman occupation of Israel in the first century BC and then continuing to the first century AD, lots of Jews end up living outside the land. So there is a very large Jewish population in major Roman cities throughout the empire. So there's a Jewish population in Rome, there are Jewish synagogues in Asia Minor, we see Paul travel to them in Book of Acts. There's an enormous, not enormous, but a large Jewish community in Northern Egypt, in Alexandria. These Jewish communities are called the diaspora. It's from the Greek word diaspora, which literally means to be scattered or dispersed.

So you will sometimes see this referred to as the dispersion, more commonly scholars will call it the Jewish diaspora, and it just means the Jews who have been dispersed throughout the Gentile lands. Well, if you go back and look, you'll note that in First Peter 1, the audience of this letter is explicitly identified as members of the diaspora. It says this in First Peter 1:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappado'cia, Asia, and Bithyn'ia, chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood

So since ancient times, the letter of Peter has been read as a letter written to Jews in the diaspora, but to Jewish believers in Christ who are members of this diaspora,

living among the Gentile nations, but are Jewish people of faith. Now, one reason that's significant, as I mentioned elsewhere, but I'll say it again, is that if you recall, in the letter to the Galatians, when Paul gets...before Paul gets in his little conflict with Peter, it says that Paul went down to Jerusalem and had a conference with Peter, James, and John, and there was an agreement between them that Peter and James and John would minister to the circumcised and Paul to the uncircumcised. So there was a kind of division of labor that took place. That the pillars, Peter, James, and John would be apostles to the Jews, and Paul would be an apostle to the Gentiles. Now, that doesn't mean that Peter never talked to Gentiles or that Paul never talked to Jews. We see that Paul would always go to synagogues in the cities that he evangelized, but he saw his principle mission as being to the nations and Peter's mission being to the circumcised.

So since ancient times, the Catholic epistles, James, Peter, John, and Jude, although everybody forgets about Jude, have been seen as written primarily to Jewish believers in Christ, whereas the Pauline letters are written to Gentile believers reflecting those two missions. So here a case can be made that Peter is written to Jews in the dispersion, living in Asia Minor, primarily, but in these Gentile communities. So that's one level on a historical level. But there's another element to this, which is that Peter is using the image of exile to describe, not just exile from the earthly promised land, but the exile of being in this world rather than in the world to come, of living in this age rather than in the age to come, of having faith, like we see he says here, in the things that are invisible and in the promised land that we can't yet see.

So if you want an example of this, you can, for example, in Hebrews 11, there's a similar language of exile that takes place. So if you just turn there for a second, just to shed a little light on this text. In Hebrews 11:13-16, listen to this. This is describing Abraham as an exile, and it says, Abraham and Sarah and like the other righteous people:

These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from

which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.

So notice what Hebrews is doing. It's taking the language of faith and the language of exile and applying it to Abraham and the Old Testament saints and saying, even though they were in the promised land, they were still exiles because although they were living on earth in the earthly promised land, they were longing for a better country, a heavenly homeland, a heavenly promised land. I would submit to you that the same thing is true here in the letter of Peter, when he says:

conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.

He doesn't just mean earthly exile from the earthly promised land, he means earthly exile from the heavenly promised land to which Christ will gather His people when He comes again in glory. Now, the reason that's so significant, for me at least, is that the word for exile, are you ready for this? I don't know if you're ready. This is important, is *paroikos*. *Paroikos*. It literally means to live beside a house. Para means next to or beside, and an oikos means a house. So if you live or dwell beside a home, it means you don't have a home yourself, right? Okay, so a person who is in exile doesn't have a home. Well, what's fascinating about this, and I owe this insight to this wonderful commentary on First and Second Peter by Daniel Keating, he talks about the implications of this terminology because *paroikia*, or exile, is where we get the English word parish from. A parochial school is a parish or a school of exiles. A parish is a community of exiles, it's a place where those of us who are exiles on earth and who long for a heavenly promised land gather together as we journey toward that heavenly promised land. So this is Daniel Keating in his commentary, he says this quote:

“Sojourning” is literally “dwelling beside” (*paroikia*)... Why is this instructive? Our English word “parish” derives from *paroikia*. The local church—our parish—is meant to be the gathering of Christian “sojourners”

and “aliens” who are far from their true home. And what is our *true* home? It is where God dwells...²

Let's stop there for a second. I don't know about you, but I'm not sure that's how most Catholics think about their parish, right? It's so easy for us to think about the parish purely as the local community or as the institution where we participate. And it's all those things, but it's helpful for us to remember that our parish is literally a gathering of exiles, of immigrants, of aliens, of people who don't have a home in this world, because we're all journeying toward the world to come. And I think that just gives a different connotation to what we mean when we talk about what that parish community is. And so I'll close here with a quote from the Venerable Bede, another commentary on the Catholic epistles. This is an ancient one from the eighth century, who talks about what it means to live in exile. Because if you've ever lost your home, I laugh because I know something of what that's like, because living in South Louisiana, it has more than once happened where we've had a devastating hurricane come through, and then everyone is dispersed. The hurricane, the devastation, the tragedy creates a dispersion so that friends and family that all used to live together are now scattered, not just throughout the state, but throughout the country and even into other countries. So exile is a painful thing. It's a thing that causes suffering. And earthly exiles and earthly dispersions continue to happen in our own day, wherever there's famine or plague or war or strife or natural disasters that can cause these dispersions. But for us, it's crucial to remember that at the end of the day, and the parish points this out to us, this earthly valley of tears is not our home. We are on a journey heading toward a better country, a heavenly promised land. So Bede writes:

“Live out the time of your life here in fear,” lest namely through sloth and carelessness you become unworthy of so great a father, and, while you may live out the time of your life here safely, you may not be able to reach the promised happiness of the fatherland.³

² Keating, Daniel. *First and Second Peter, Jude*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.

³ Bede the Venerable. *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1985.

So what St. Bede is saying there is the reason Peter is exhorting us to live out the time of exile with fear is because we need to constantly remind ourselves that this isn't our home. This isn't our ultimate destiny, and if we don't live as if that's the case, we might actually risk not reaching the promised Fatherland of our eternal home. So once again, powerful words from the First Letter of St. Peter that help us to remind ourselves that wherever we live in the world, we are part of the dispersion because our ultimate homeland and our ultimate destiny, the house into which we long to enter is the house of our heavenly Father.