

"Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame." Words from our 2nd reading today from the 3rd chapter of Peter's first letter – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

Jack: "Say Jill, what do you believe about God?"

Jill: "I believe what my church believes"

Jack: "Well, what does your church believe?"

Jill: "The Church believes in what I happen to believe in."

Jack: "Ok, so what do you and your church believe?"

Jill: "We both believe in the same thing."

"Always be ready to give an explanation of your hope," St. Peter tells us, but sometimes our explanations can be as clear as mud, which is to say, sometimes, it's hard for us to give a good explanation. That's why it's important not only to keep learning more about our faith, but also to keep reflecting upon it and keep contemplating in our hearts the personal and saving relationship that we have with God. Indeed, if we sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts, as St. Peter asks of us, then this will come as second nature as we speak from our own personal experience and understanding, and it's important that we do so because people are looking to us – they are looking to us – for the Good News.

We know of course that there is more than enough bad news to go around for us all, whether it's Coronavirus or scandals in the Church, a bad economy or more talk of blame and retaliation in the affairs between world powers. Amidst all this bad news, people are looking for hope; they need hope. It's said that, "Human beings can live about forty days without food, about three days without water, about eight minutes without air... but only one second without hope." Now, hope doesn't mean burying our heads in the sand and pretending everything is hunky dory because we know that the suffering and fear we all experience at one point or another is very real, and there is a need to stay informed. But hope says we can overcome these bleak realities. Hope says there is more to the story and to this life; there is good news. Hope says in spite of it all, we are going to get through this. And that hope is precisely something that we Christians have to give. When people look at us and say, "how is it that you can be hopeful in the midst of all this, what is the reason for your hope?" We can share with them the Good News that our hope is in the salvation Jesus brings, and we are confident that God will love us through this, that God is loving us through right now.

This hope has always been alive in the Church. In our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the situation and outlook for the early Christian community was actually looking rather bleak. Persecutions were breaking out against the Christians, and they were scattered, many of them being forced to leave the Holy City of Jerusalem. As they were expelled from

synagogues, they began practicing the faith from their homes, much as we are doing right now. The adjustment to a new normal wasn't easy, and there were even conflicts between Jewish Christians and Gentile and Samaritan Christians. Today we say no big deal, but this rivalry extended back hundreds of years to the days of King Solomon, and this conflict threatened to divide and destroy the fledgling Church. Discrimination by Christians against the very widows and poor whom they were called to serve was scandalous to the Gospel, which is what led to Philip among others being appointed as a deacon, which we heard all about in the readings last week. Queue our first reading today, where we see Deacon Philip ministering to the once neglected, down-on-their-luck, Gentile, Samaritan Church. And in the face of all these difficulties when the Church faced improbable odds in the world and couldn't seem to get its own affairs in order, what happened? Many signs and miracles were yet accomplished in Jesus' name, and the people of Samaria accepted the Word of God with great joy. We heard Jesus promise in the Gospel today, "I will not you orphans. The Holy Spirit, the Advocate will be with you always." Indeed, the Holy Spirit was moving in the Church. This Church wasn't failing; it wasn't dying; it was alive!

God made good on his promise, and continues to make good on his promise to us today. That's the Good News. It is the same Spirit who enlivens us. The Spirit is our Paraclete, our Advocate, the reason for our Hope. It is the Spirit who strengthens us, comforts us, guides us, and inspires us. It is the Spirit who enables us to interpret the signs of the times in ways very different from the ways of the world. It is the Spirit who works through us for the world's transformation. It is because the Spirit has already been given to us that in the midst of our journey of life, we are able to live the promises into fulfillment.

St. Peter goes onto say, "[when you give your] explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame." It's not just words that count but our actions are important as well. Integrity of life is a great witness to hope. A life in the Spirit is only complete when we conform our lives to the commandments of God, not in a legalistic way but out of love. If disciples truly love Jesus, they will listen and do what Jesus asks of them because obedience is not the requirement for love, it is the consequence of it. Love prompts us to pattern our lives after the model of Jesus and so live as agents of God's love in the world. Not too long ago, there was a Buffalo boy who heard Jesus compassionately declare, "I will not leave you orphans," and responding in hope to a very real need, he put that commandment of love into action. His name was Father Nelson Baker. Who will be the next saint from Buffalo, responding with Good News of hope to a Church and world very much in need of it? Like Father Baker and Deacon Philip, how can we be the loving presence of Christ to those in our midst? What is the reason for our hope? Why, it's Jesus Christ crucified and risen, present to us always – alleluia! By the power of the Spirit, let's live that hope into reality.

Readings: <http://usccb.org/bible/readings/051720.cfm>

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Lectionary: 55

Reading 1ACTS 8:5-8, 14-17

Philip went down to the city of Samaria
and proclaimed the Christ to them.
With one accord, the crowds paid attention to what was said by Philip
when they heard it and saw the signs he was doing.
For unclean spirits, crying out in a loud voice,
came out of many possessed people,
and many paralyzed or crippled people were cured.
There was great joy in that city.

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem
heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God,
they sent them Peter and John,
who went down and prayed for them,
that they might receive the Holy Spirit,
for it had not yet fallen upon any of them;
they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
Then they laid hands on them
and they received the Holy Spirit.

Responsorial PsalmPS 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20

R. (1) **Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.**

or:

R. Alleluia.

Shout joyfully to God, all the earth,
sing praise to the glory of his name;
proclaim his glorious praise.

Say to God, “How tremendous are your deeds!”

R. **Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.**

or:

R. Alleluia.

“Let all on earth worship and sing praise to you,
sing praise to your name!”
Come and see the works of God,
his tremendous deeds among the children of Adam.

R. **Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.**

or:

R. Alleluia.

He has changed the sea into dry land;
through the river they passed on foot;
therefore let us rejoice in him.
He rules by his might forever.

R. **Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.**

or:

R. Alleluia.

Hear now, all you who fear God, while I declare
what he has done for me.
Blessed be God who refused me not

my prayer or his kindness!

R. Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Reading 21 PT 3:15-18

Beloved:

Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.

Always be ready to give an explanation
to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope,
but do it with gentleness and reverence,
keeping your conscience clear,
so that, when you are maligned,
those who defame your good conduct in Christ
may themselves be put to shame.
For it is better to suffer for doing good,
if that be the will of God, than for doing evil.

For Christ also suffered for sins once,
the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous,
that he might lead you to God.
Put to death in the flesh,
he was brought to life in the Spirit.

Alleluia JN 14:23

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Whoever loves me will keep my word, says the Lord,
and my Father will love him and we will come to him.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel JN 14:15-21

Jesus said to his disciples:

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.
And I will ask the Father,
and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always,
the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept,
because it neither sees nor knows him.
But you know him, because he remains with you,
and will be in you.
I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.
In a little while the world will no longer see me,
but you will see me, because I live and you will live.
On that day you will realize that I am in my Father
and you are in me and I in you.
Whoever has my commandments and observes them
is the one who loves me.
And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father,
and I will love him and reveal myself to him.”