

Homily for May 16, 1999  
7th Sunday of Easter

By Father Charles Bowes

Acts 1:12-14  
1 Peter 4:13-16  
John 17:1-11

## *Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, our great and gracious God gives meaning and purpose to all humankind.*

Our contemporary secular age has a hard time dealing with Jesus...some magazines offer not just the refusal to face up to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but a deep resistance to the transcendent God whom Jesus reveals. All miracles must be deemed impossible; any mention of transcendence is suspect; all messianic claims, all reference to an afterlife are unacceptable; any thought that we need salvation by his death on a cross must be repressed.

The contemporary "secular sage" insists that it is all so ordinary this faith, this story, this gospel, this Jesus. Yet is precisely the extraordinary, the supernatural, that makes him what he is – not only his moral teachings (which some great sage might dream up), but also his resurrected body (which no other religion has come up with), and the seeming disgrace of his cross. Ah, the cross...no human inventiveness would dare to concoct what was an embarrassment to the Roman Empire, a stumbling block to the Greek

world, and a repudiation of Gnosticism – a reasoned way to explain everything. As the great philosopher Soren Kierkegaard suggested, "If faith is an offense to rationality, how might reason deal with faith other than by rejecting it?"

It is not new, this struggle of faith in Jesus Christ. Since the beginning it was known that if we banish Christ's divinity, he and all of us are utterly alone. He was just another heap of chemicals who died. It is humanity alone on that cross. And it is a stranded humanity that is left with post-resurrection delusions.

But if we believe that Jesus is indeed the eternal word of God made flesh, then our very God was crucified as well, and the destiny of our dying bodies is somehow found in the presence of the Almighty God.

If we do not believe that the cross bore the sorrows of God as much as it does our own, then on this recent Good Friday we ought not to have approached that wood to kneel. If we do not believe that by his resurrection we are destined to be free, we ought not to have sung our alleluias on his day of victory. If it was not a heavenly, unearthly Jerusalem to which Jesus ascended; we ought not gather to look and pray to a God beyond who beacons us.

For it is sheer folly, these things we have done this Easter season, if Christ does not reveal our sublime fortune. It was all a charade if our saving God was not on that cross, if it was not miraculously one of us who ascended on high. But if we worshiped in faith this season, which now draws to a close next week, we are the agents of the only true revolution that has graced human history.

In the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, neither Christ nor we are “confined” to dogma or scripture. Rather, our God is revealed and we are therein liberated.

It is God with-us, Emmanuel, who died our death. It is the God who called history forth and loved it enough to marry it, to preserve and save it, to redeem its terrible, fragile beauty. Thus it was with full heart that we could pray on the Fridays of Lent: “We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee, because by thy holy cross, thou hast redeemed the world.” And it is with faith in the miraculous, the transcendent, that we, like Jesus in the fourth gospel, look to heaven for the giver of eternal life, the glory of the earth and the love and truth for which we all came. “Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, in the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ,” said Jesus in John 17. We celebrate this in our holy season and at every Eucharist as we journey to the table and touch one another, the Body of Christ.

Humankind’s desperate need for meaning in the face of death is captured quite well in a story told by Wyatt Cooper, in Town and Country magazine, about his three year-old son. Cooper writes: “When my son Carter was three, he began to ask about death. After seeing the movie *Ben Hur*, he inquired, ‘All that was two thousand years ago?’ I answered, ‘yes.’ ‘And someday everybody alive now will be dead and there

will be other people living here?’ ‘Yes.’ There were no other answers to give. He had summed the whole story up very well. He thought it over for a few moments and then rendered judgement on death itself and humankind’s universal fate, saying, “It is a strange way of doing it.”

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