

Reflections

Homily for April 27, 2003
2nd Sunday of Easter Cycle B

By Father Charles Bowes

Acts 4:32-35
1 John 5:1-6
John 20:19-31

*By the light of faith, we too say,
“My Lord and my God.”*

What a wonderful expression of belief and love! Saint John’s gospel is painting a picture of the apostle Thomas here, well after he and his contemporaries have died, a picture that forces us to look at the object of the disciple’s intense emotion. The evangelist is asking: Who is Jesus Christ for us today – for us who never knew him in the flesh?

Nearly 1,500 years before Thomas, Moses had looked at a bush that burned and saw God. There’s even a Jewish story that says there was really nothing extraordinary about this particular bush. All bushes burn because they all hold God’s presence; it’s just that Moses took the time to look, and because he took the time, he saw.

We don’t know how much time it takes to see God’s presence. We may feel that we do not have the time that was available to Moses – that we do not have the teacher available to Thomas. But like Moses and Thomas, even when we cannot see, we have a God who causes bushes to burn and Christ to be raised from the dead. And when we take the time to open our eyes, we

can see God present in people and in the rest of creation. We can see God in bread and wine and in one another. We can hear God in a word proclaimed. And in these instances, we can only say, “My Lord and my God.”

Folks, now the Church is giving us another instruction on how to pray the Mass. The Church does this at regular intervals now since the Second Vatican Council. We’ve actually had, I think, about four instructions – the one that those of us old enough to remember best of all was the first – when the Mass was changed from Latin into English. Subsequent instructions have clarified different things and brought about various practices. Now we have another instruction, a further refinement. Over the next so many weeks, I’ll be inviting you to join in reflecting on what we’re being asked to do, and I’ll even be offering you an opportunity after Mass to reflect on these things further. There is a little process we use to reflect on our prayer, and by so doing we can deepen our prayer and come closer to God. As an example of how this works, I’d like to try a little experiment today. I would like to reflect a little bit on the gesture we use for receiving Holy Communion in the hand. I realize not everyone receives Communion in the hand, but I think it might become clearer how our Catholic prayer calls us to a posture of contemplation and reflection so

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that we, like Moses, like Thomas, can see God in and through the life we live and touch.

At this moment I'll invite you to just simply sit up straight as best you can in the place you have and to be quiet for a moment. I realize those of you holding children do the best you can, because I think God is especially there as you hold the little ones.

Now I ask you to open your hands and place them together in the way we are called to do when we receive Holy Communion. According to the most ancient instruction, we make our right hand a throne for the left to receive the King of Kings. Just sit there for a moment holding your left hand in your right hand, palm upwards. Hold your hands in your lap that way if you can. Here are some questions for you to answer quietly inside your head. What do you notice about your hands? What do you notice while you hold this gesture? What does the gesture say about the posture, the location? What feelings surface as you hold this gesture? Wonder? Sadness? Anger? I'm going to share with you now some examples of what some people have said when they have reflected upon the gesture this way. These are not right or wrong answers – just examples:

“I feel like a beggar, offering myself to Christ. As a beggar, I feel alone, hungry, and yet hopeful...that I will be fed.”

“My hand resembles a crucifix here now.”

“I feel a kind of sadness and emptiness. I hold my hands out hoping I won't be rejected.”

“Cradling...tenderness...both hands cradling...working.”

Here's another question. When you hear the words, “The Body of Christ” as you look at your hands, what feelings surface?

Here again are some comments made by others who have done this exercise:

“My hands poised to receive the Eucharist remind me of the cradling of the Lord's hands around us (how very tiny we are!). They remind me of the vessel of the womb holding the perfect creation planted there. Holding so dearly, so tenderly.”

“The hand position represents three things to me: begging, asking for Jesus; open, tender receiving of Jesus; offering myself to Jesus.” Let us reflect for a moment in silence on what we've just done.

As we come to Holy Communion today, bring your hands. If you wish after Mass, reflect on this further in the room to my left in the rear of the church. In the weeks to come, we'll be reflecting on receiving Holy Communion and listening to God's word and the use of silence. In all of this we are called to deepen our reverence for the Eucharist and to adopt a more meditative, reflective posture at Mass. We have a lifetime to do this. And we shall with God's good grace.

By the light of faith, we too say,
“My Lord and my God.”