

3rd Sunday of Easter

The disciples gathered in a room where the Holy Spirit set their hearts on fire to announce the good news. Eleven apostles descended to the streets of Jerusalem where a large crowd had gathered from many countries. Peter proclaimed what had happened fifty days before: Jesus had risen from the dead and was pouring out the Holy Spirit among them even now.

To illustrate, Peter quoted lines from a bedtime prayer that everybody knew, Psalm 16. He zeroed in on one line: “You will not abandon my soul to hell, not let your holy one see corruption.” Those lines, prayed by faithful Jews for hundreds of years, prophesied what happened to Jesus. The Father did not abandon him in death, and did not let his holy body see corruption. Instead, the Father raised Jesus from the dead. Peter, standing before a crowd of people aware of their mortality, summarized it this way: “It was impossible for Jesus to be held by death.” To a people beat down by illness, aggression, and prejudice, this good news must have seemed incredulous.

Today we welcome representatives from Journey to Bethany, a center for those harmed by clergy sexual abuse that promotes healing and justice. In the scriptures, Bethany was a place where Jesus found consolation from trusted friends: Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Through the website journeytobethany.org, the center extends the same to those who are struggling on the road to life. All sexual abuse is unacceptable, but, when committed by clergy, it layers additional struggles onto the victims, making it harder for them to trust in a spiritual source that should be providing comfort. I am a co-signer on a letter to survivors, that says, in part, “We recognize how difficult it can be to make a phone call or send an email about how sexual abuse affected your life, even when you are seeking healing. We invite you to reach out to us as partners to accompany you in addressing the wounds you still have. Please know that people of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph care about what happened and are committed to you.”

This Wednesday is our annual diocesan day of prayer in atonement for those harmed by sexual abuse. Bishop Johnston will preside for a special Mass at the cathedral in St. Joseph, and I will preside here. No one could predict that these observances would take place at a time that the people of Kansas City are shaken by an accusation of racially motivated violence against a 16-year old who rang the doorbell of the wrong house, looking for his twin brothers. It is especially at times like this that we benefit from listening to Peter’s message to the people on the streets of Jerusalem, where he quoted Psalm 16. God will not allow his holy ones to undergo corruption. It was impossible for Jesus to be held by death. And it is impossible for God to be restrained by the consequences of sexual abuse or racial violence.

The refrain we sang today finds a home on the lips of all who suffer. Its good news may seem incredulous, but it derives from very Word of God: “Lord, you will show us the path of life.” The Lord has conquered all that is evil. He sets our hearts on fire to announce good news. We are not without hope. There is a path of life, and God will show us the way.

Saturday, April 22, 2023