

FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

Monday in the Fourth Week of Easter

Reading

Acts 11:1-18 (RSV)

Peter's Report to the Church at Jerusalem

11 Now the apostles and the brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. **2** So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, **3** saying, 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?' **4** But Peter began and explained to them in order: **5** 'I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, something descending, like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came down to me. **6** Looking at it closely I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. **7** And I heard a voice saying to me, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." **8** But I said, "No, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth." **9** But the voice answered a second time from heaven, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." **10** This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. **11** At that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesare'a. **12** And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brethren also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. **13** And he told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, "Send to Joppa and bring Simon called Peter; **14** he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household." **15** As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. **16** And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, "John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." **17** If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?' **18** When they heard this they were silenced. And they glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life.'

Reflection

ST LUKE has already given us, in Acts 10, an account of Peter's vision at the House of Cornelius and how, subsequently, the Gentiles get to hear the Good News. Now, in Acts 11, we find him retelling the story to the Church

in Jerusalem. It is such a pivotal moment in the development of the life of the Church that setting out the evidence before the gathered Church, almost forensically, is an important stage in the argument. Peter has his accusers – called ‘the circumcision party’ – and it is significant that he had six brethren with him – all Jews – when he visited Cornelius. Some of the ingredients of a trial are here. Peter presents the evidence ‘in order’, that is, ‘point by point’: ‘point by point’ is the very way St Luke aims to present things at the beginning of his Gospel. Here we have a *narratio*, a narration. There is a *probatio* in the form of witnesses and signs. And there is a very short summing up, a *peroratio*. ‘If ...God gave the same gift to [the Gentiles] as he gave to us [Jews] when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?’ The context for this dramatic new development is not just the encounter with Cornelius and the dream but Peter’s memory of the word of the Lord (v.16) that the gift would be not just the water-baptism of John but baptism with the Holy Spirit. There will be more to say tomorrow about the Mission to the Gentiles.

Tuesday in the Fourth Week of Easter

Reading

Acts 11:19-26 (RSV)

The Church in Antioch

¹⁹ Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none except Jews. ²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number that believed turned to the Lord. ²² News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad; and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose; ²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a large company was added to the Lord. ²⁵ So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul; ²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church, and taught a large company of people; and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians.

Reflection

The Gentile Mission

WE SOMETIMES forget that, in the early days of the Church, it was only Jews, and those who converted to Judaism, who were included in the broad mission of the Church. There are exceptions to this from the first: the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21ff) – called by Mark the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24ff) is rebuffed by Jesus but argues with him saying that ‘even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs’; similarly both Matthew (chapter 8) and Luke (chapter 7) tell the story of the healing of the centurion’s servant. The issue of whether Gentiles can be included in the community of the Church without first converting to Judaism is not settled finally until the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) but Peter, staying in Caesarea in a centurion’s house, learns in a vision that the Jewish dietary laws no longer apply. In Galatians 2 we glimpse how troublesome the issue must have been. Peter (and James) are clearly apostles to the Jews and Paul (and Barnabas) to the Gentiles but there is a row between Peter and Paul when in Antioch Peter draws back from eating with Gentiles. The word used is ‘insincerity’. It is clear from today’s reading that Antioch is a lively centre for the Christian Church. We hear of ‘a great number’ and ‘a large company’.

There are early witnesses that Saint Peter founded the See of Antioch before he went to Rome. We hear this from Saint Ignatius of Antioch and Saint Clement of Rome. Antioch, a cosmopolitan city, was then seen as capital of the East, and, as our reading says, it was where followers of Jesus are first called ‘Christians’. St John Chrysostom tells us that Saint Peter was in Antioch for a long period, Saint Gregory the Great that Peter was seven years Bishop of Antioch before going on to Rome.

It is startling to think that, had the argument gone the other way, the Church as we know it – mainly historically a Mission to the Gentiles – may never have really got underway.

Wednesday in the Fourth Week of Easter

Reading

John 12:44-50 (RSV)

I have come as light into the world

Jesus cried out and said, ‘He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. ⁴⁵ And he who sees me sees him who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have

come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. ⁴⁷ If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. ⁴⁸ He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. ⁴⁹ For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me.'

Reflection

A Summary of Jesus' Mission

IF SOMEONE were looking for a summary of Jesus' teaching, we would probably point to Matthew 22 – You shall love the Lord your God...and...love your neighbour as yourself. But today's Gospel from John 12 gives us another succinct summary. Jesus is the Light of the World and whoever sees him sees the Father who sent him. What he says is what the Father bids him say and the way out of darkness into light is believing in Jesus. Both of these summaries – the Summary of the Law and the Summary of Jesus' Mission as Light in darkness – arise from conflict with the religious authorities. In that sense, nothing changes. In our day we are not in conflict with Pharisees or other religious leaders but with the secular opinion-formers of our society: we live among many who doubt the truth of the Gospel. There is nothing new under the sun: the unbelief of the people, which Jesus is confronting in today's reading, is a challenge for the Church in every generation. It is important, then, for us to show that the Love of God and our neighbour – a radical commandment for ordering our lives – and placing our belief and trust in Jesus as Light in darkness – setting proper bearings for the living of a holy life – are the way to have life and to have life in abundance. As Jesus himself put it a little earlier in John's Gospel: 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10:10). Or, as we prayed in the Collect, may those 'who thirst for what [God] generously promise[s].. always have their fill of [his] plenty'.

Thursday in the Fourth Week of Easter

Reading

Acts 13:13-25 (RSV)

Paul preaches in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia

¹³ Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphyl'ia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem; ¹⁴ but they

passed on from Perga and came to Antioch of Pisid'ia. And on the sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵ After the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." ¹⁶ So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said:

"Men of Israel, and you that fear God, listen. ¹⁷ The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. ¹⁸ And for about forty years he bore with them in the wilderness. ¹⁹ And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance, for about four hundred and fifty years. ²⁰ And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. ²¹ Then they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. ²² And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king; of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.' ²³ Of this man's posterity God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised. ²⁴ Before his coming John had preached a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. ²⁵ And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'

Reflection

Paul explains the history of salvation to Jews of the diaspora

We meet St Paul today on what is known as his First Missionary Journey. The Missionary Journeys led to the establishing of a number of city congregations in the Near East. The names are familiar to us in the titles of some of the letters – Colossae, Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica. But here we see Paul in Antioch in Pisidia. Even though we have seen that Paul is viewed as the Apostle to the Gentiles, his method seems to have been to head for the local synagogue and speak first to the Jewish diaspora. This was not all he did: in Acts 17 we find him in the Areop'agus in Athens, preaching in the open air. In today's reading, he shows us how he preaches to the Jews. He re-interprets Jewish history in the light of the Christian story of redemption. This involves seeing not only how the longing for a Messiah emerged in Hebrew history but also how Jesus is the fulfilment of that longing. In some ways, we are in a similar situation. Amidst secularism and despite secularism. there has been an explosion of on-lone searching for bibles and religious meaning. Whenever our faith in

materialism falters, as it has done recently, we seem to fall back on spirituality, in some shape or form.

Friday in the Fourth Week of Easter

Reading

John 14:1-6 (RSV)

I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴And you know the way where I am going.' ⁵Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?' ⁶Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.'

Reflection

Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage

We probably don't pause and think about the psalms often enough. Whether seen as the hymn-book of the Jewish Temple or a wider collection of Hebrew poetry, the Psalter has also been at the heart of Christian Prayer from the beginning. The Daily Office is essentially the psalms as the cycle of liturgical prayer. Some psalms are brilliant for this purpose: others are more obscure. It is often remarked that the mood of the Psalter fits very well with the emotional life of the believer: that depends on temperament, for nearly a third of all the psalms are laments. And yet nothing is more uplifting than the hymns, the prayers of confidence, and the thanksgiving psalms we find in the Psalter. Today's psalm – Psalm 2 – is what is called a 'royal psalm'. The earthly king in Jerusalem is anointed and empowered by the heavenly king. Unsurprisingly, the Church applies this to the relationship between God the Father and Christ, his anointed Son. This is simply an instance of how what is local and specific in the Psalter is made universal in the liturgy of the Church. As we pray for peace in the world, we pray that the nations of the world will come under the Lordship of Christ, the Prince of Peace.

The May Magnificat

Gerard Manley Hopkins SJ
(1844–89)

MAY is Mary's month, and I
Muse at that and wonder why:
Her feasts follow reason,
Dated due to season—

Candlemas, Lady Day;
But the Lady Month, May,
Why fasten that upon her,
With a feasting in her honour?

Is it only its being brighter
Than the most are must delight
her?

Is it opportunist
And flowers finds soonest?

Ask of her, the mighty mother:
Her reply puts this other
Question: What is Spring?—
Growth in every thing—

Flesh and fleece, fur and feather,
Grass and greenworld all
together;
Star-eyed strawberry-breasted
Throstle above her nested

Cluster of bugle blue eggs thin
Forms and warms the life within;
And bird and blossom swell
In sod or sheath or shell.

All things rising, all things sizing
Mary sees, sympathising
With that world of good,
Nature's motherhood.

Their magnifying of each its kind
With delight calls to mind
How she did in her stored
Magnify the Lord.

Well but there was more than
this:
Spring's universal bliss
Much, had much to say
To offering Mary May.

When drop-of-blood-and-foam-
dapple
Bloom lights the orchard-apple
And thicket and thorp are merry
With silver-surfèd cherry

And azuring-over greybell makes
Wood banks and brakes wash
wet like lakes
And magic cuckoocall
Caps, clears, and clinches all—

This ecstasy all through
mothering earth
Tells Mary her mirth till Christ's
birth
To remember and exultation
In God who was her salvation.

