

HOMILY OF THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

WE HAVE AN ADVOCATE

The relationship between the Judaic religion and that of Christianity was an interesting one but at the same time tragic and far from being cordial. This lack of cordiality between the two great world religions was necessary at the time because if the apostles, the ringleaders of the opposition, were not such bold and fearless the Jews would have subjugated the uprising of Christianity which they saw as a threat to Judaism and make them much more corrupt than they were. Peter and the rest of the apostles did not give them such opportunity as we can see in today's first reading. The apostles were so bold as to challenge the hypocrisy of the Jews because of their conviction in Christ's teaching and because they were witnesses to the brutal killing of their master by the wicked Jewish people and how they preferred the murderer, Barabbas, to Jesus. We hear Peter, the mouthpiece of the apostles, accusing their accusers – the Jews – of masterminding the killing of Christ the savior even when Pontus Pilate confessed that he found Him guiltless. But like their master, Jesus who seeks opportunity to preach repentance, they asked the Jews to get converted assuring them of pardon from our merciful God.

Last Sunday we celebrated the Solemnity of the Divine Mercy where God proved to man how incomprehensibly great His mercy is and calls us to come back to Him for healing and cleansing if we had strayed from the right way. Today, through the apostles, He continues to call us to repent and turn back from our sins so as to have our sins forgiven and enjoy His merciful love.

Though Peter in the first reading sounded sarcastic to the Jews, he was only trying to press a point that would make them strike their breast in deep sorrow for their sins and say 'I am sorry.' He wanted to let them realize the man they murdered in cold blood was guiltless. Awareness of this fact would have made the Jews to repent and make amend. Hence, he did not leave them hopeless but asked them to repent of and have their sins forgiven. He even went further to excuse them of such barbaric and dastardly act meted for their master. Maintaining that they were used as instruments to actualize the prophesy made long ago 'that Christ must suffer', come true. He assured them that they would have their sins forgiven only if they would sincerely repent of them and call on God's mercy.

In the second reading again, St John also emphasized that his reason for writing to us was to keep us free from sin. But again, being aware of our frailty, he added that even if have sinned or will unfortunately happen to fall into sin in the future, we

need not be discouraged or despair because 'we have an advocate with the Father, Christ Jesus the Redeemer. According to him, the proof that we know God is our ability to keep the commandments of God. Christ also in the Gospel reprimanded His apostles for their incredulities and opened their mind to understand the scriptures.

There is here, a general call to repentance and turning away from our sins. In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul says that 'where sin abound grace abound the more.' Rom.5:20. Many great sinners in the past great saints are today. We need not focus on our past failures and frailty but more on the mercies and righteousness of God who is calling us. Our firm decision and determinations will just turn the story round from sinners to saints, from a no people to a people of God, as is true in the lives of many saints we read today.

Before being converted, St. Paul the great apostle of the gentiles was a criminal, a killer and a persecutor of Christians and feared by all who followed Christ. But today he is a great saint. Saint Augustine who is one of the great fathers of the church was a criminal, promiscuous and a hater of God and religion. St. Mary of Egypt was effectively used by the devil to seduce the believers but on an encounter with our Lady when she was on her evil mission, she became converted and today she is a saint. St. Afra, her mother and two of her friends were prostitutes but when they encountered the Lord, the story changed and they were both converted and not only became saints but also martyrs. We may be ranked among these penitent saints if only we can opt for God today and not tomorrow.

Repentance means turning away remorsefully from our wrong doings and coming back to God in search of spiritual, psychological, emotional and physical healing. As a patient doctor, God waits for our coming back to Him with ever readiness to forgive us and heal us. As the father of the prodigal son He waits expectantly every day for our coming home. He will, if we do, put a golden ring on our finger, remove a dirty blood stained and torn cloths we are putting on and have us robed with princely regalia. He will have no time to reprimand us but will fatherly ask us to cheer up. The angels and saints, the martyrs and virgins, the apostles and patriarchs will both rejoice to see us coming back to God. Above all, the mother of God will jubilate on seeing our return to the eternal Father and will naturally cuddle us and lavish on us undeserved love and kindness and the consequence is that we shall enjoy uninterrupted peace and tranquility.

On our part, we need to free our hearts of every acrimony, anger and vengeful and hateful feelings. To do that, we should forgive our offenders just as God has forgiven

us in Christ. Those who cannot forgive are still slave to their wicked passion and will never enjoy the true freedom of the children of God.

Finally, we need the gift of faith in order to fight a spiritual battle. The battle is a carnal one and should not be fought carnally. Sometimes reason may be able to lead us to every place we need to enter in this journey, it means that if we want to arrive our destination safely and without hitch, we should possess faith. If it is lacking in our lives, we should ask for it in prayer.