

Second Sunday of Easter, Year C – April 28, 2019 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 925 words

The Catechism’s section on sacraments teaches us that “what was visible in our Savior has passed over into his mysteries”.¹ In other words, the Church’s sacraments make Christ’s saving work really present here and now and perpetuate it through time. In each of the sacraments time and eternity meet and Jesus himself really reaches into our lives – as if we were with him when he walked the earth and could see him face-to-face. And because of the Church and the mysteries – the sacraments – that our Lord gave her, his work can be wrought in all places, in all times; it is not confined to a geographic area nor to the limits of his physical presence.

If you listen attentively to the readings throughout this Easter season, you can often see how this teaching worked itself out historically. Today’s readings are no exception; the gospel especially illustrates Christ’s “handing over” of the mystery or sacrament of confession. We know that in the prayer of absolution, the priest tells of how “through the death and resurrection of” Christ, God “reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins”; in the gospel, we see how after his death and resurrection, Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit upon his apostles and sends them out for the forgiveness of sins.

The fruit of his death and resurrection – even though those saving events took place on specific dates in history, now far in the past – can yet be applied to all who seek his mercy, through the ministry of the apostles and their successors. Now this might seem like such an elementary review of what we believe, but it’s so important that we reflect upon it – all of us. For we all run the risk of approaching the sacraments in a routine way, failing to see them as a saving encounter with Jesus Christ himself. We need to look beyond the individual minister – beyond the externals – and perceive the Lord, who really is at work. Faith makes that possible.

The first reading gives us another angle on this principle that Christ’s work has been handed over to his Church and continues through time. Peter’s mere shadow brings healing to those who are in need of a physician; it reminds us of the woman who hoped to touch at least the fringe of Christ’s garment. Moreover, the people brought the sick and the possessed to the apostles, who were able to cure them. Even today, through the ministry of bishops and priests the sick are anointed, being healed in soul and sometimes even in body. And these same continue Christ’s work of casting out evil spirits, also, through the ministry of exorcism.

We must pray for a deeper faith in and a fuller understanding of this fundamental teaching about the sacraments: namely, that Jesus Christ personally works through them, through the minister; indeed, he works even in spite of the minister – for as recent scandals have shown, some have fallen quite short of the standard of the Master. Do we have the eyes of faith to see Jesus, even to greet him and thank him, as he works through his imperfect ministers? Or do we rather sometimes let the minister himself “stand out”, as it were, and in our minds and hearts focus more on him than on the Lord Jesus, who is at work? “Lord, that I may see...”

This reflection and prayer is important for another rather urgent reason: namely, that many young men today hesitate to answer the Lord’s call to sacred ministry because they rightly sense their own imperfections and general unworthiness. They need to hear this message also: their efficacy as a minister – if they answer God’s call – will depend primarily on Christ, who will work through and in spite of them. None of us is worthy. It’s not about us; it’s all about Jesus. To those young men, I say, hear this: not only will Christ work through you; his grace will also transform you. It’s all about Jesus. When we see through to him, there is hope.

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1115.

When I think back over this past Holy Week – I spent over 15 hours “in the box” with not a minute to spare (that’s about 12 hours more than our usual times), and there were days when additional priests were here to help also! –; it drives home just how great our current need for priests is. We have a generous schedule for confession here at St. Paul’s – and if I could get the priestly help, I would expand it further on a habitual basis. Our other parishes, some much larger, need to expand their times as well. There are young men who are called – and who yet hesitate. Perhaps they focus more on their imperfection than on the Christ who calls!

As we wrap up the Year of St. Joseph this coming week, let us make a renewed plea to him for assistance in helping those young men to answer the Lord’s call. Christ will work through them in spite of themselves; he will transform them. He will do things they cannot even dream of right now. Imagine the awe of the apostles, who found themselves forgiving sins, driving out demons, and healing the sick – after some of them had been so weak, fleeing the cross and even denying our Lord! But it’s all about him! May he grant us the eyes of faith to see him doing his saving work in our midst each time a sacrament is celebrated.