

The Second Sunday of Easter, 27 April 2025

Readings: Acts 5.27-32, Psalm 150, Revelation 1.4-8, John 20.19-31

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. **Amen.** (Psalm 19.14)

On this Second Sunday of Easter, a day after Pope Francis' funeral and before celebrating with Betty her 100th birthday with members of her family present we are invited by the Acts reading to consider to whom allegiance belongs, to what extent we are prone to conform to the world or allowing ourselves to be formed by the same rather than being forever shaped by the Gospel, the Good News of Christ Jesus who is our beginning and our end, who is the beginning and end of all creation. To what extent are we ready and willing to put ourselves under God, to be directed by God, to obey: Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.

In the earliest days of the Apostles, who fully identified as Jews as in the phrase "in the God our ancestors", they will not be silenced. Prior to today's short reading from the Acts of the Apostles they, the apostles, were put in prison by order of the High Priest, who together with the Sadducees forbade them to teach about and in the name of Jesus. The apostles are then 'miraculously' freed from prison and having been freed from prison they do not flee Jerusalem, but go straight back to the Temple to teach about Jesus. Foolish? Courageous? Necessary?

No doubt the apostles' action is a provocation with consequences. They are hauled in front of the council, we assume the Sanhedrin, and are told in no uncertain terms that they are not to preach in the name of Jesus. Their appeal is to a higher authority. Their appeal is to God and thereby bypass the religious and even the political authorities. We are not to be tamed by the political and religious authorities as Christians, but by the gospel as religious and political authorities should be. Who wants to be tamed? All of us want to be inspired! On the Third Sunday of Lent we prayed as the Collect for the Day directs,

*Almighty God,  
who alone can bring order  
to the unruly wills and passions of sinful humanity:  
give your people grace  
so to love what you command  
and to desire what you promise,*

*that, among the many changes of this world,  
our hearts may surely there be fixed  
where true joys are to be found;...*

The goal of our Christian pilgrimage is to uncover daily, 'where true joys are to be found...' The Christian proclamation is that they are found in God, who has made Himself known in Jesus, drawing close to us, so close that he can invite a disciple to draw near and see and touch his wounds endured for us that we might be set free to life, a life always richer than a life we craft (basteln) for ourselves in choosing to limit ourselves to this world alone.

How do they, Peter and the apostles, answer the high priest? 'We must obey God rather than any human authority.' They answer the high priest with one voice as the reading directs. Theirs is a common witness. They are united. In a few brush strokes Luke the author of Acts gives us a glimpse of one of the earliest summaries of the Gospel message to which the apostles bear testimony:

'The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, so that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.'

The word translated as leader and sometimes as prince is a more active noun... Jesus is a leader who inaugurates (an inaugurator) and as we will come to know, as we walk with Him, he ushers in a new kingdom, he inaugurates a new way of being with a different set of rules and values. We heard of two of them on Maundy Thursday, when we reminded ourselves of the New Commandment that we are to love as Christ loves us and that the example we are to emulate is that of a servant, as we see Jesus rise from table and wash the disciples' feet, and that we are to remember him as we gather week by week on the first day of the week, our Sunday, to feed on his word, to drink of his cup, to pray for the world, and to enjoy the company and fellowship of other Christians our faces always turned to God and the world. Do this in remembrance of me. And we do so gladly. It is our duty and joy. It is good and right.

'Now concerning the qualification in today's reading, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.' (1 Corinthians 12:1) It would be easy to ignore it. Here in Acts picking up

on John's farewell discourse, there isn't just the hint of a notion to obey, but rather a requirement. In John we hear Jesus say,

"You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name." (John 15:14-16)

In Acts we hear the Apostles testify to the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost saying,

'And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.' (Acts 5.32)

Charles Wesley, the greatest of hymn writers, knew something of the requirement to obey when he wrote,

'A heart resigned, submissive, meek, My great Redeemer's throne, Where only Christ is heard to speak, Where Jesus reigns alone; An humble, lowly, contrite heart, Believing, true, and clean; Which neither life nor death can part From him that dwells within;... (A heart to praise my God)

Now all the above is true. I happen to lean into more rather than less as I age, but it leaves us with a question: How does faith, Christian faith, impact on everyday life? One example will need to suffice. I had the good fortune of listening to *Gedanken für den Tag* on Ö1 on Easter Tuesday, the day after Pope Francis died. The speaker was Hubert Gaisbauer, an Austrian journalist and the inaugurator of 'Menschenbilder', an Ö1 radio programme. He spoke about Pope Francis and how he brought into focus Tutto! Tutto! Tutto! Everyone! Everyone! Everyone! The Church must not lose sight of anyone: the rich or the poor, the powerful or the disenfranchised, the strong or the feeble, the young and the old. The Church is for all. She has a message for all. The message she proclaims is life-affirming, life-changing and challenging. We can therefore commend it to every person made in the image of god, as they are.

On Easter Tuesday Gaisbauer focussed on one of Pope Francis' less known but welcome initiatives the inauguration of the World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly in 2021. Betty our centenarian is actually a great grandparent in both senses. Gaisbauer begins with a quote from a poem by the poet Hölderlin, 'Es ist ruhig das Alter und fromm'. 'Old age is quiet

and devout'. Pope Francis we are informed quoted this passage often as he thought of his own grandmother, who taught him amongst many things how to make Piedmontese bagna cauda, a sauce with anchovies, olive oil and garlic in which fresh vegetable strips are dipped.

What follows are Gaisbauer's impulses on Thought for the Day (Gedanken für den Tag). They are firmly based on Pope Francis' writings, his teaching. Listen.

Francis repeatedly talks about the spiritual riches of old age that need to be discovered. The prayer of the elderly and grandparents is a wealth for children... An injection for the whole of society, especially for those who are too busy and too distracted. Someone must also sing for them, interpret the signs of God for them and pray for them.

Paradoxically, the old are the future of a church that prophesies and dreams together with the young. Being old is a vocation. And old age is by no means the time to pull the oars into the boat. Where the young talk to the old, there is a future. ... old age .. also teaches us about the ministry of fragility.

Because God is in every life. Even if a life appears withered or dried up life is always a place where seeds can grow, not just sometime, always. That is a dogma, a teaching of St Francis to be followed. According to St Francis God also wants to write new pages with you, the old ones. He ... prefers to be the you (das Du) in every person's life.

I cannot help think of Paul's words to the church in Corinth that we should no longer live for ourselves (a defining characteristic of many of our contemporaries), but for Christ and always towards Christ and his kingdom and in the words of today's Acts reading, 'We must obey God rather than any human authority. As I recall Francis' insistence Tutto! Tutto! Tutto! Let us hear these words from St Paul in the light of Holy Week and Easter,

'For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.'

Thomas reminds us who Christ is when he exclaims for all to hear, My Lord and my God!

Finally, only a verse or two later from the same letter Paul writes, 'And Christ has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors,...' The world, the whole of creation is God's creation, like the disciples let us go to the heart of the Temple

that the world might know where true joy, hope and peace are to be found. Tutto! Tutto!  
Tutto!