

Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Easter

April 18, 2021

In the First Reading today we meet Saint Peter not long after Pentecost when the Holy Spirit filled him and the other apostles and gave them clarity, conviction and courage. Peter and John are on their way to the Temple when Peter stops by one of its gates to heal a man lame from birth who regularly begged at that location. Instantly healed the beggar now comes with them into the Temple courts where he begins jumping about and praising God. The people recognized him and are astonished.

So, Peter uses this opportunity to preach to them; telling them that God has glorified Jesus, whom they rejected and handed over to be killed, and challenges them to recognize that Jesus is the Messiah and “Author of life” whom God raised from the dead, and that it is by faith in Jesus’ name that this man has been healed.

Peter goes on to assure them, *“I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers”* but now they must repent and turn to God so that their sins may be forgiven.

Possibly only a minority of those who rejected Jesus were motivated by malice.

Most of them likely didn’t know what to make of Him. They thought they knew God and understood His ways, and what to expect in the Messiah, but they were wrong. They were blind to their ignorance.

The word “ignorant” is often misunderstood and misused nowadays. Many think of it only as an insult – as calling someone rude or stupid – when in fact it means merely a lack of knowledge or understanding of something.

It comes from the Latin word *ignorare*. The prefix “*in*” means “not” and “*gnarus*” meaning “aware or acquainted with.” Not to be aware or acquainted with something.

So, when Christ cried out from the cross, “*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing*” (Lk 23:34), He was not exaggerating.

Everyone is born ignorant into the world. But we are not meant to stay that way. Especially about those things which are necessary to fulfill our human nature and destiny.

Catholic theology distinguishes between *invincible* ignorance and *vincible* ignorance.

Invincible ignorance involves a lack of knowledge that a person *is unable* to overcome. They may have some sort of intellectual, psychological, historic or cultural impediment. Such a person cannot be held responsible for their ignorance.

Vincible ignorance, on the other hand, is a lack of knowledge that a rational person *is capable* of overcoming by making an effort. Such a person can be held responsible for their ignorance, as they are capable

of understanding that which they need to know and have a duty to strive to learn it.

It is like the old legal adage: “Ignorance of the law does not excuse.” If one is driving a car, for example, one is *expected* to know the laws of the road. If you are pulled over by a police officer for a traffic infraction, saying you did not know that particular law is not acceptable. If you are behind the wheel, you have a responsibility to know it.

We are the drivers of our lives in this world; we are expected to search for the purpose for which we exist and the moral laws and spiritual truths which are meant to guide us. Of our own, however, this would be a hard to impossible task. Beyond natural limitations is the fact that, as the Greek statesman Demosthenes once noted, “Nothing is easier than self-deceit. For what each man wishes, that he also believes to be true.”

That is why God revealed Who He is and why He created us. And why Christ opened the mind of His apostles (i.e., the magisterium of His Church) to teach in His name (see Lk 24:45; 10:16; 1 Tim 3:15). We therefore have a duty to know and live the truths that have been revealed.

For as we read elsewhere in the Acts of the Apostle, the time when God overlooked human ignorance is over; now He commands us to repent, for He has fixed a day when the Risen Lord will come to judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:30-31).

So let us ask Saint Paul to intercede for us with the prayer he once made for the Ephesians: *“I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know Him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power for us who believe, according to the working of His great power”* (Eph. 1:17-19). Amen.