

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. I found among [your objects of worship] an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’

(Acts 17:22,23b,28)

Dear Friends:

This is Paul at his best, is it not? While on the way to Rome, he has stopped off and pursued his ministry in Thessalonica and Beroea and now arrives in Athens, the philosophical and intellectual epicenter of Greece. Unwilling to pass up any opportunity to cultivate converts to Christianity, he sizes up the local mission field. The text says he was dismayed at the signs of paganism on every corner, but I have to believe Paul knew in advance the local situation and accepted the opportunity to evangelize in the power of the Spirit.

Paul is brought in front of the Areopagus (hill of Ares), the site of the councils of Athenian kings, to explain his teachings. Artfully, he preaches the knowable God, departing from the Athenian ‘unknown god’ without a word of direct criticism. Later in the ‘Areopagus sermon,’ Paul quotes two pagan Greek poets, Epimenides (6th c. BCE) and Aratus (3rd c.), again not to diminish but to build relationship, relevance, and common ground. Could those on the public forefront of response to the virus contagion learn something from Paul’s approach to those who differ from him?

You and I are mired in the milieu of conflicting ‘news’ and ‘data’ as they relate to this virus contagion, its aftermath, and its cure. Pundits miss no opportunity to erect one more ‘altar’ to unknown or unknowable explanation or prediction. I believe we must go back to that which is authentic, the One whom Paul proclaims.

Faithfully,

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The Collect

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Collect for Relief from the Virus Contagion

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, graciously comfort your people amid the uncertainty facing us in the Coronavirus contagion: Mercifully attend to those who are sick, bless those who seek a vaccine and cure, bless our Church and civic leaders as they seek to guide us, and fill our hearts with confidence that, though at times we may be afraid, we may still put our trust in you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Concluding Collect: For the Election of a Rector

Almighty God, giver of every good gift: Look graciously on your Church, and so guide the minds of those who shall choose a rector for this parish, that we may receive a faithful pastor, who will care for your people and equip us for our ministries; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

First Reading—Acts 17:22-31

Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far

from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’ Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Psalm 66:7-18 *Jubilate Deo*

- 7 Bless our God, you peoples; *
 make the voice of his praise to be heard;
- 8 Who holds our souls in life, *
 and will not allow our feet to slip.
- 9 For you, O God, have proved us; *
 you have tried us just as silver is tried.
- 10 You brought us into the snare; *
 you laid heavy burdens upon our backs.
- 11 You let enemies ride over our heads;
 we went through fire and water; *
 but you brought us out into a place of refreshment.
- 12 I will enter your house with burnt-offerings
 and will pay you my vows, *
 which I promised with my lips
 and spoke with my mouth when I was in trouble.
- 13 I will offer you sacrifices of fat beasts
 with the smoke of rams; *
 I will give you oxen and goats.
- 14 Come and listen, all you who fear God, *
 and I will tell you what he has done for me.
- 15 I called out to him with my mouth, *
 and his praise was on my tongue.
- 16 If I had found evil in my heart, *
 the Lord would not have heard me;
- 17 But in truth God has heard me; *
 he has attended to the voice of my prayer.
- 18 Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer, *
 nor withheld his love from me.

Second Reading—1 Peter 3:13-22

Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you - not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Holy Gospel—John 14:15-21

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."