

Homily

5th Sunday of Easter A 5.14.17

Father Todd Molinari

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we are celebrating the fifth Sunday of the Easter Season, and every Sunday our Lord takes our hand and leads us a little deeper in the reality of the resurrection.

The readings today all proclaim this important theme: That Christ crucified and risen is high priest and unique mediator between God and man, and that he has made of the Church a kingdom of priests for God the Father. To be a priest means to be one who offers sacrifice and who makes something holy by offering it to God. Christ is the real and true priest because he offers himself and all mankind to God and he is the one who does the offering. This is what happens at the Mass. Yet all the baptized share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:4-9 says this: “Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” And: “You are ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises’ of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

Usually when we think of the priesthood we just think of the ministerial or ordained priesthood of the priests or the fathers who offer Masses and hear confessions and are pastors of parishes. This is true, but the ordained priesthood is just at the service of the universal priesthood of all the baptized. So to be baptized means that we partake in the priesthood of Jesus Christ risen from the dead, albeit in a way distinct from the ordained priesthood.

I remember one time when I was assigned as pastor of a parish for the first time, and a couple of months after I arrived I went to the Confirmation classes to give a talk to the candidates and to their parents. I began by asking a simple question: Who is Christ? I waited, and waited, and waited, and no one answered. I asked again: Who is Christ? Again I waited, and no answer. Finally a mother raised her hand and said, “Father, these children have not learned anything. The Church is not doing her job. We drop the children off and pick them up in our cars. You have the children for one hour a week and they are not learning anything.” And so I asked: “How many parents teach their children at home what we teach at the church?” A couple of hands were raised. So I said, “These children will not learn their faith or live their faith until and unless what we teach them at the parish is also taught at home. All of you need to be priests for your children.” And about half of the parents got mad and walked out.

I share this story with you because some times we can think that only the ordained priest can really be holy or really do the work of Jesus, and oftentimes the Church herself has tended to “clericalize” everything to the point that the role of the rest of the baptized

has been diminished. The ordained priest does have an important role in the Church, but this does nothing to take away the responsibility we all have to share in the priestly ministry of Christ by virtue of partaking in the universal priesthood of Christ through our baptism.

It all starts at home with taking our Catholic faith seriously, making our homes sanctuaries of God and of prayer, and a place where we open up ourselves to God. At times we get into desperate situations we lose hope and think God does not care about us or does not hear us. We get upset and angry and can be tempted to lose hope. But this is the moment when we need to remember that we are a priestly people, and that the person who approaches God with true humility will be listened to by God. But this is the important thing regarding prayer: We need to say “not my will be done, but your will be done, O God.” In the early Church, the Church Fathers recognized that the term “prayer” as applied to the priestly people of God was unhelpful because it was too closely associated with the pagan forms of prayer: Ask God to do this and I will do such and such to get a response. This “transactional” or “mechanical” way of approaching God is not at all Christ-centered. In its place, the Fathers offered “Eucharist”, “sacrament”, adoration and “contemplation” to speak of our relationship with God.

This means as a priestly people, we relate to God in such a way that we need to let go of our own agendas, our own false self and our pride. We need to be open to the possibility that God relates to us in a way that is different than we expect, but it will always be the best way for us - the way that leads to the truth and to the life. God is infinitely creative and powerful and he has the ability to undo any problem or open up new pathways for us to walk down that previously were not there. But in order for this to happen, we have to open our lives to the reality to God first, otherwise it does not work.

What this means is that we cannot treat God like a cartoon character in the sky. We cannot treat God as someone who is just waiting to punish us. No, if we are to be his priestly people we need to affirm that God respects us and gives us dignity, and so we should not be afraid of taking him seriously.

Jesus says to us: “Amen, amen I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater than these.” To share in the priesthood of our baptism means we do the works of Christ, that is, we practice the virtues of Christ towards those in our lives. This Sunday let us resolve to do so with a renewed faith as his priestly people.