

Reflections on Sunday's Readings: May 26, 2019



Sixth Sunday of Easter and Memorial Day Weekend

Acts 15: 1-2, 22-29

Revelation 21: 10-14, 22-23

John 14: 23-29

“Growing in the Spirit of God”

Introduction

I would like to begin by inviting you to think about the three most important events of your life. They might be major transition moments like getting married, the birth of your children, or a major change in your life. Take a few moments and reflect on your life in this way. [Pause]

Fr. Karl Rahner, SJ, one of our key Catholic theologians of the 20th century and one I would liken to Thomas Aquinas or Bonaventure in the Middle Ages because of the depth and breadth of his theological insights, described in 1979 what he saw as the **three pivotal stages** in the history of the Christian community and the Catholic Church. These key events led to new epochs or “ways of being” for the Church.

Primitive Jewish Christianity

The **first stage** was the primitive Jewish Christianity time period that encompassed Jesus’ life, ministry, death, and resurrection, and the early Jewish-Christian movement. Here Christianity existed within its own cultural reality as a movement within Judaism. Early Jewish Christians would both pray at the temple and pray in their houses together as followers of Christ.

Acts 15

In today’s first reading from Acts 15, we hear about the struggle to enter into the **second stage** in which Christianity became open to the then-known world. As Gentiles (those beyond the Jewish community) became Christians, there arose a discussion and struggle of how to reach out to the Gentiles and whether they would be asked to follow the Jewish law and the custom of male circumcision. Basically, the question was whether the new Gentile Christians would need to become Jewish to follow Jesus the Christ.

As the reading from Acts offers there was quite a lot of discussion, and this was a difficult moment in the young Christian movement. With discussion, prayer, and wise reflection, the early Christian community decided that God had welcomed the Gentiles into faith in Jesus the Christ freely as a gift. The community decided that the Gentile Christians did not need to follow

the Jewish law or customs to live as Christians. This step in the development of Christianity accepted the fuller vision of faith “being a ‘gift’ freely given to all.” This step emphasized that the Christian faith is more about a relationship with Christ and with other Christians than it is about the following of rituals and the keeping of laws.

All of this points to the **core of the Gospel message**, and what I like to call the “Gospel ethic,” the key to our faith together. This can be found in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians, in Chapter Three, verses 26 and following.

“... in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s (and Sarah’s) offspring, heirs according to the promise.”

We are children of God and heirs according to the promise and journey of relationship in faith and trust in God, just like Abraham and Sarah; and God is ever at work bringing about this unity of the human family along with its mutuality and equality.

Vatican II and a Global Catholic-Christian Church

Though the Church spread in various countries after the decision at the Jerusalem council, it became over time and through various historic developments (for example, the development of the Holy Roman Empire and the split of the Catholic Church in 1054 AD between East and West) a Euro-centric or Western Church.

The **third stage**, or the third significant event ushering in a new epoch, that Fr. Rahner offers is Vatican II. Here Rahner offers that **Vatican II**, with bishops and participants from all around the world, helped to move the Church from a Europe-dominated Church to a truly “catholic” or universal, global Church community. This may give us some understanding and appreciation for the importance of the times in which we are living. The Church is pointing the way for us in the world to see ourselves as a global family, and our human society is pushing us to more fully embrace this sense of unity in diversity.

Something to Offer

And we have been given something important to offer here. We have been given the **key** as Christians as to what is the inner dynamic of this “union in diversity,” of what holds us together as a diverse human family. We’ve been let in on the mystery of God’s dreams for us in the human family and for all of creation. This key is **love**: unconditional, generous, self-giving love which is at the heart of God. God is love, and this personal love of God is **the Advocate**. The Holy Spirit given to us is the source of peace and the source of unity among us.

A Movie about a Veteran

A final story, yesterday morning as I was eating breakfast, I turned on the news for a while; and then I went to the classic movie channel. I love the old movies, even the ones in black and

white. There is often a “moral of the story” in these movies. I began to watch a movie called “The Razor’s Edge” with Tyrone Powers and Gene Tierney. It is a story about a veteran after WWII. Close to the end of the war, a fellow soldier saves this veteran’s life by giving up his own life for him. This veteran tries to explain to his fiancé that he can’t just settle down now after the war by marrying her and taking a well-paying job. He shares that he needs to search for some answers to his questions. He wonders if there is any meaning in life, or is it all just randomness? Why is he here and his buddy is dead? He needs some time to make sense of life and find a deeper meaning to life, if it is there. I was hooked, and I decided to watch the whole movie because it was a lighter morning of commitments.

His fiancé lets him go, and he returns to France where he feels free to search for answers to his questions. He is beginning to feel better about life; and when his fiancé comes for a visit after a year, he asks her to join him in marriage and in this simple lifestyle he has adopted. They want different things out of life, and so they break off their engagement.

The veteran continues to search for meaning, and he goes to India and meets a spiritual master there. This spiritual master sends him up into the mountains to a small hermitage. He invites the veteran to stay there alone for a while and to let something about life surprise him there. The veteran does have a mystical experience where he feels all one with creation and the universe. He does experience a closeness with God, and the spiritual master knows it is time to send him back to his own circle of friends and culture.

In the final scene as he is leaving his circle of friends once more, especially his former fiancé, she comments to a good friend “We won’t see Larry again, will we?” And her friend replies that he doubts that they will. But he offers to her that “the greatest force in the world is goodness, and Larry has found this.” Not many find it, he shares, but Larry has. And he must follow this sense of goodness and experience it with others. I see something of myself here. I found the title “The Razor’s Edge” speaking to me this morning as I prepared my homily. I believe it speaks to the need to stay close to people to experience this force of goodness. This is where goodness is to be found and exchanged. For many of you, this will be in your family circles; but for others, it can be among other circles of community.

Conclusion

Once again today, we are invited to draw close to God and to let God draw close to us. We are invited to “say yes” to God’s love so we might become good, authentic, single-hearted, and ever-more generous. We are invited to become good persons and to share this goodness and to find this goodness by staying close to life and to one another. We are invited to let our lives grow simpler and more whole-hearted. As we approach the Feast of Pentecost together, let us pray for one another for these gifts to be renewed and for them to grow within each of us and among us as a community.

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