

Easter 5, 07

1. Did you watch the television on the Mormons? I watched some of it. One of the commentators kept stressing the fact that in just two generations this religion has gone from being on the fringes of American society to being at the center of its mainstream. It was on the fringes because it was founded by a man who claimed to have seen golden tablets and who later adopted polygamy as a lifestyle for his community, a practice which it has now abandoned. Its acceptance by the larger society is now seen in the political prominence of two of its members, Mit Romney, the past governor of MA who is now running for the presidency, and Senator Larry Reid.

2. But the part of the program which impressed me the most was that one which told of the necessity of all young men of the community going on mission for two years. “You go, you go, you go,” one young Mormon said, because your father went and your uncles went and your grandfather went. Families are left behind. I think some of us have encountered these young Mormons. They are always dressed very conservatively with ties and jackets and short hair. I believe that a year or two ago I spotted two such

young men roaming Woodland Ave. Their job is to tell you about their church, the church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints.

While I cannot accept their message, I think that their willingness to preach Jesus is something we could imitate, even if we do it in a more indirect way.

3. Today's First Reading from the Acts tells us about two other young men preaching Jesus. They are Barnabas and Paul. They set out from Antioch in Syria and head via Cyprus to the southern coast of present day Turkey. There they make their way inland, visiting different cities and preaching Jesus first in the synagogues of these cities and then to their Gentile inhabitants. Sometimes they are stoned; other times they find acceptance. When they return home to Antioch in Syria, they gather the community to tell them "what God had done with them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles."

4. Going on mission, being on mission is an essential part of Christian faith. Paul and Barnabas did it, and Christian men and women have done ever since. And it continues today. We Catholics know it well. Even if we don't go to a different country to preach the Gospel, we know that other members of our church do. And we are constantly asked by the church to support them

through our collections. Many of us also receive mail from different groups such as the Maryknoll order asking us to support their work. In short, our church is hugely missionary, and, at the moment, we are told that the fields ripe for the harvest are to be found in Africa and Asia. Many of us, therefore, can justly claim to be missionaries of the second order. We are not there ourselves, but we are supporting those who are with our money and our prayers.

5. I have often felt that besides the supernatural or faith motivation which those who become missionaries have, in many cases there is also a natural basis for this kind of work. Missionaries are often, though not always, people who like to travel, who are not content to live and die in one place. But if that is true, then it might also be true that this natural basis is lacking in some of us. We are content to stay put. But that does not free us from the obligation to preach our faith to others. It simply means that we will have to do it at home. And whether we do it at home or do it as a missionary in Africa, we are both doing the same thing: we are preaching the Gospel.

6. But what does that mean? What is the Gospel, and how do we preach it? Our second reading and Gospel for today give us good

answers to that question. The second reading promises us a life in a new world in which every tear will be wiped away, where there will be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away. And it has passed away because someone has come who makes all things new. That someone is Jesus. He is the promise of a new world, a world which is not yet here but which he calls us to begin here and now. So our message is both a promise and a task. We have to begin to build the Kingdom of God.

7. And how do we do that? Today's Gospel gives us the answer: by loving each other as Jesus has loved us. We build the Kingdom of God by modeling to the world how people should live together. They should live together by loving each other as Jesus loved us, faithfully and fully, even to the point of the sacrifice of our own lives. Thus we preach the Gospel by living lovingly together. And if we don't do that, it won't help to go off to the farthest corner of the world to be a missionary. No, the mission takes place wherever people try to love each as Jesus loved them.

8. Here at St. Charles we must try to do that. That is why we say hello to each other at the beginning of Mass, so that we may not worship as strangers but as sisters and brothers in the body of

Christ, that is, as those who should respect and care for each other, indeed as those bound to love each other as Jesus has loved us.