

Sunday Homily

6th SUNDAY OF EASTER

17 MAY 2020

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK II

“Always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have.”

Illustration

Ethiopia is a land that is familiar with hardship, with famines, droughts and wars that increase the suffering of the people. For the love of these people, Bishop Armido Gasparini, an Italian missionary, made Awasa, in southern Ethiopia, his home. He and his small band of Comboni missionaries showed the love of God through their tireless work in training lay catechists, establishing medical clinics in rural areas and providing schools.

From having one parish in the early 1960s, the Church in Awasa has grown to twenty parishes, with many more outstations. There are now hundreds of catechists and the Catholic population has increased enormously. Every day many hundreds of people are treated in the clinics, and thousands of children are receiving an education who would not otherwise have done so. When Bishop Gasparini retired in 1993, he explained how he could see the difference that Christ had made in the lives of the people.

Gospel Teaching

We cannot all be missionaries in distant countries, but we can take the love of Christ to the people around us. It has never been easy to evangelise, and persecution has been the response to many who have gone before us. When Philip the deacon first went to the Samaritan town he was by no means assured of a warm welcome. This was shortly after Stephen, another deacon, had been stoned to death, and Saul of Tarsus had begun his persecution of Christians. Philip had escaped to the northern province of the Samaritans, a people who expected the Messiah but were considered heretics by the Jews. Philip proclaimed the Good News of Christ and by his authentic witness won over the people there. The power he had drawn on to enable him to do his work was the Spirit of truth. This was promised by Jesus, in today's Gospel, to all who love him and who keep his commandments.

In Peter's first letter, written at a time of persecution, we are advised to be prepared to explain what our faith is about and why we continue to be people of hope. But whatever words we use, it is by the way we lead our lives that we are

judged. If we keep Christ's commandments, we can keep a clear conscience and anyone who slanders us will be proved wrong. And, like Philip, we do not have to struggle alone. The promised Holy Spirit will come into our lives to give us strength and encouragement. As Bishop Gasparini observed, it is Christ through the Holy Spirit who makes a difference in our lives and in those of the people who accept him with joyful hearts.

Application

As Christians we have received the Holy Spirit in baptism – a power that is not of our own making. This power is the very same that sustained the martyrs in their gruelling punishments and executions; the same that encourages missionaries to endure hardships for the love of other people. It is the Spirit that enables us to find the words to use to describe why we are followers of Christ.

But the Spirit needs our cooperation too. Philip could not have converted the Samaritans if he had not gone to them, nor could Bishop Gasparini have established his schools and clinics if he had not settled in Ethiopia. To have the answer ready for anybody who wants to know about Christianity, we do have to give the matter some attention. We need to know about our faith in order to share it with others. It helps if we have access to courses, or books or other means of deepening our knowledge. Talking about it with our friends and family can help us put our thoughts into words. Studying scripture and spending time in prayer are also vital ways of preparing for the times we need to explain our beliefs to others.

Yet note how St Peter cautions that our words have to be given with courtesy and respect. How easy it is, when something so dear to us is discussed, to allow ourselves to become embroiled in arguments. Yet it is also in the way we conduct ourselves, and in what we do, that the message is most effectively conveyed. But we need not be discouraged, for even if we do not think we have said the right things or been great models of Christian living, it is the Spirit who will work in the hearts of the other people; and we know we can leave the results of our endeavours safely in the keeping of that same Holy Spirit.