

IT IS NOT RIGHT THAT WE SHOULD GIVE UP PREACHING THE WORD OF GOD TO SERVE TABLES

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Homily of the 5th Sunday of Easter, May 22, 2011
Acts 6:1-7, Ps. 32, 1 Pet. 2:4-9, John 14:1-12

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me’” (John 14:6).

Jesus Christ is the way to the Father. He was sent into the world by the Father to reveal the Father to the world. No one has seen the Father except the Son, and no one knows the Father except the Son and the one to whom the Son has revealed him. Jesus is one with the Father, and therefore in seeing Jesus, we see the Father. “No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (John 1:18). Only the Son can reveal the Father, because only the Son has seen him. “All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matt. 11:27). The Son who is one with the Father is the only revelation of the Father. If we want to know the Father, it will only be through the Son. Only by knowing the Son will we know the Father. “He who sees me sees him who sent me” (John 12:45). “If you knew me, you would know my Father also” (John 8:19). “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?” (John 14:10). “No one comes to the Father but by me” (John 14:6).

Since this is so, how important it is to preach Christ to the nations so that all may come to know and believe in him and become united to the Father! Such was the conclusion and decision of the apostles when “the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution” (Acts 6:1). Instead of waiting on tables themselves, the apostles appointed others to this social service, because they did not want to give up their work and vocation of preaching the word of God and devoting themselves to prayer. Therefore “the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables ... We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word’” (Acts 6:2, 4).

We have the same problem today. There are so many needs that we can see, but it is a temptation to leave off preaching the word of God—if that is our

vocation, and if we were ordained and sent out to do that—and instead of preaching, wait on tables. Indeed “it is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables” (Acts 6:2). There are other people that we can put in charge of this social service. If we who have been ordained and sent to preach the word of God do not do so, who will?

But how shall we preach? In many ways Jesus Christ is as much the stone rejected by the builders today as he was at the beginning of the Church, when so many Jews rejected him. Even among many who call themselves Christians today, he is a rejected stone and not the head of the corner. Indeed “the very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner” (1 Pet. 2:7). They are nominal Christians, for whom Christ is the Son of God, a good man, and a good example of love, but not the true Savior who through his death on the cross saves us from our sins and from the guilt that depresses us. For them, God is only love. He is never angry, he never punishes, and so there is no need for a true Savior who saves us from God’s punishment for our sins. There is no need for a Savior who takes our place and suffers our just and necessary punishment for us instead of us. For them, God is only love, and so they have stopped believing in the atonement and redemption of Christ. No longer believing this, they no longer preach it either. They only preach love, and they only preach Jesus as an example of love, whom we should imitate by waiting on tables. In time, they get tired of preaching even this, and so stop preaching the word of God—which they were sent to do—in order to wait on tables.

What we should rather do is to recognize Jesus Christ as the true Savior whom God has sent into the world to save us from our sins, to give us repentance and forgiveness, and to remove from us the pain of our guilt that depresses us. He was sent to give us the gift of the Holy Spirit who fills us with happiness and joy. Christ is the stone which is the head of the corner, which the builders—the Jews and some preachers today—have rejected. “The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner” (1 Pet. 2:7).

But it is very different for us who have accepted Christ with living faith as our true Savior from sin and from the punishment of guilt by his death on the cross, where he suffered all this for us to free those who believe in him from this suffering. He saves and frees us from this darkness. You who believe this, for whom Christ is the true Savior, “are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

Even after being saved through faith by such a Savior, we will still sin and fall into imperfections—hopefully ever smaller sins and ever smaller imperfections—and

when we do, we will feel bad and will not feel God's forgiveness; but when we take refuge with living faith in Christ and in his redeeming work on the cross, he forgives us and restores us to his peace and happiness. Our new life in Christ is mostly lived in this peace and joy, which only he can give. This is what we should preach, that Christ is the only way to the Father, and that we can only be truly happy in him. The vocation to preach Christ is of the greatest importance. We should not exchange it for anything. Others can be put in charge of waiting on tables.