

THE HEART OF THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

Fr. Steven Scherrer, MM, ThD

Homily of Monday, 16th Week of the Year, July 18, 2011
Exod. 14:5-18; Exod. 15; Matt. 12:38-42

“Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, ‘Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.’ But he answered them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah’” (Matt. 12:38-39).

In fact, Jesus gave many signs—his miraculous cures and other miracles, such as the multiplication of the loaves. Now he promises them one further sign, which would be the greatest sign of all, his resurrection from the dead. He predicts this here in a veiled way, saying, “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40). But despite all these signs, some of the scribes and Pharisees wanted to see still more signs, and Jesus was not pleased with their request. It showed a lack of faith, and so he called them “an evil and adulterous generation” (Matt. 12:39).

Today as well many do not believe in Jesus Christ, even though he has given us so many signs. For us, his greatest act was his death on the cross for our sins and his resurrection into the glory of his Father after three days. Through this act, our sins are forgiven, and we have been given a new and illuminated life to walk from now on in the splendor of his resurrection. But how many are there who do not believe in this and so do not benefit from such a great act of salvation?

In the first reading, we have the great act of salvation of the Old Testament, the exodus from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea. This event was the great type or foreshadowing of the death and resurrection of Christ. In the exodus, God saved his people from slavery and destroyed all their enemies in the sea. In the death and resurrection of Christ, God saved us from sin and from the death we would have suffered as a punishment for having sinned, suffering it himself for us, in place of us, who believe in him.

This is the preaching of the Church, the *kerygma* of the apostles in the first days of the faith—that is, that Jesus is the Messiah, that he died for our sins, and rose triumphant over our death, and that in him there is repentance and forgiveness of sins for all who believe in him, confessing their sins. This is the message that we preach today in all parts of the world unto the ends of the earth. This liberates man, freeing him from his guilt, which depresses him. This illuminates his heart with new light and gives him jubilation of spirit, new hope, and eternal life. What greater thing could we give to a person than this—salvation and eternal life? There is nothing more important than this. The Church is sent to all the peoples of the world to bring them this salvation of God in Jesus Christ. And since Christ has taught us that we are to help others, giving food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, and clothing the naked (Matt. 25:35-36), we do that too. But the main reason for Christ’s coming into the world was to save us from our sins and give us eternal life through his death and resurrection. This is the great sign which he gave us, and which we preach. This is the greatest thing we can give to others. To preach this,

convert unbelievers, baptize them, teach them (Matt. 28:19-20), and build and plant churches, or communities of people who believe and experience this, is the very heart of the mission of the Church in the world.