

III Easter 2020

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

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1 St Peter 2.11-17 St. John 16.16-22

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Jesus tells his disciples..."Good-bye"...just for "a little while".

We're still in the Easter Season but today's Gospel takes us back to Maundy Thursday and the Last Supper. From now until Pentecost...all of the Gospel readings are from Chapters 14-17 of John's Gospel...commonly called the Farewell Discourse.

Good-bye and farewell are sometimes used interchangeably...but they have different meanings. We often say "good-bye" to a friend after a great meal together or a shared vacation. We say "good-bye" to each other after Mass with the expectation we will see each other again soon. "Good-bye" is casual. "Farewell" is a more formal way of saying "good-bye" and implies we may not see each other again for a very long time.

Jesus loved his disciples and they loved him. They don't want to hear him say "good-bye". They don't want him to leave. They can't understand what he means when he tells them in "a little while" they won't see him...and then "a little while" later they will see him again. They couldn't understand what he meant when he tells them they will be sad and cry...but the world will be happy...but their sadness will be turned into joy and gladness..."in a little while".

Neither could they understand all the talk about a woman in labor...how the pain she endures during childbirth is quickly forgotten when she holds her baby in her arms: a new birth brings new life. Jesus is talking about his own suffering and death and the sorrow that would bring to them...for "a little while". But their sorrow would quickly be forgotten when they saw him again on Easter morning: Resurrection brings New Life!

Jesus promised his disciples when they saw him again their hearts would be filled with gladness, the kind of gladness no one could ever take away from them. Later Jesus would have to get them ready for his next good-bye at the Ascension...it would be a departure of a more permanent kind. Once again they would not see him...for "a little while" ...but not forever.

We are now in in the third millennium of waiting "a little while" for Jesus to return. Some have argued the current pandemic is a sign of the times...a proof Jesus is on his way back. We simply don't know that...Jesus tells us it's a question we won't have to ask...it will be obvious to everyone he's come back!

Jesus promises his disciples they will see him again in "a little while". He makes the same promise to us. At every Requiem Mass we hear Jesus' own words of comfort...he has gone to his Father's house to make it ready for us. While we are in our own "little while" of waiting for Jesus to return...we need to keep busy doing the kinds of good works Saint Peter tells us to do in the Epistle.

Peter tells us to get ready for the "day of God's visitation"...the day when Jesus will return. We don't know when that day will be and it is a waste of time trying to figure it out. What we are called to do with our time is to use it wisely and make it productive...doing the things that are pleasing to God...helping others...and living the Good News about Jesus every moment of our lives.

Saint Joseph Parish has a strong tradition of avoiding partisan politics...church or secular. Much has been said for and against sheltering-in-place, physical distancing and restrictions on church services. Paul makes it very clear we are to submit to civil authorities...for the Lord's sake...in so doing we give great honor and glory to God. We are free to live as God's people. We are not to use our freedom to do bad things.

We are now in a long period of preparation for the Second Advent...the time of getting ready for his second coming. While we should look forward to and pray for his return, we don't have to be sad because he hasn't yet come back. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit to give us patience to do God's work while we wait.

Jesus promised we will see him again in "a little while". On that day we will SEE him for ourselves...and our hearts will be filled with unspeakable joy and gladness no one can ever take away.

And there will be no more good-byes.

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