

Homily for Easter Monday 2024

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

As you know from the Newsletters, this is the first of five Cluster Masses this week. For those who do not know me, I am Gary O'Brien, one of the Parish Deacons in Christ the King and Our Lady of the Assumption, Maryvale. I am also the Clergy Coordinator of the Cluster. So it will hardly surprise you if in this homily I point out some important parallels between what we read in our Scripture today and our Cluster development. Just briefly to remind you of a crucial point I made when I preached before Lent: the direction of travel for that development is the merger of the current three parishes in the Cluster into one single canonical parish, albeit with three places of worship.

Against that background I want to focus on three aspects of today's readings:

- The deliberate use of the word "Eleven" in the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles;
- St Peter's quotation in his sermon of the psalm which, in fact, we used as our Responsorial Psalm today; and
- Our Lord's command to the women to tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee.

"Peter stood up with the Eleven" writes St Luke – the author of the Acts of the Apostles. You cannot see it from where you are but in the Lectionary, the "e" of "Eleven" is given a capital letter. So St Luke clearly wants us to understand that Peter and the Eleven were evidently a specifically recognisable group. In that case, we have to ask St Luke, how did

they become so recognisable? Both St John's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles tell us that the disciples spent most of the time from Easter day until Pentecost cowering in an Upper Room for fear of the Jews. St Mark tells us that the immediate reaction to the Resurrection was for all the disciples to run away in fear. I think we can safely conclude that Peter and the Eleven were not exactly out and about until they stepped out of the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost. Not only that, St Luke tells us in the chapter before his account of Pentecost that until Matthias was elected to take the place of Judas, it was Peter and the Ten – not Peter and the Eleven. How do we make sense of this?

We have to remind ourselves of the significance of the number 12. 12 was the number of the tribes of Israel. So "Peter and the Eleven" were recognised not because of any pre-Pentecost publicity but because it was clear that Peter and the Eleven symbolised the complete restoration in holiness of the People of God. And this complete restoration in holiness was demonstrated not just by the bonds in the community of Apostles: "Peter and the Eleven" but also by their fearless preaching.

My friends, this is an important lesson for us. What makes us the one holy Catholic and apostolic Church is not a particular building; is not a particular time of Mass; is not a particular priest. What makes us the one holy Catholic and apostolic Church is that we have been called by the Holy Spirit to gather around the Word of God and the Altar to celebrate the

sacraments and then go out on mission. That is what matters. For wherever we gather around the Word of God and the Altar Christ is in our midst. We shall need to cling to that truth in the next few years ahead.

Secondly, we come to St Peter's quotation of the Psalm. St Peter and the Eleven were all devout and observant Jews. The Acts of the Apostles records how they went to the synagogue at the customary times for prayer and then went to Mass separately in people's homes: notice people's homes – not Chapels, Churches, Cathedrals and Basilicas – but people's homes. So far so good. The Apostles kept their ancestral traditions but combined them with the New Covenant which Christ had brought. But it didn't stay that way. Eventually there was a traumatic split between infant Christianity and its Jewish heritage. But God used that experience. The mission to the Gentiles was launched and so the Gospel spread from Jerusalem to the very capital of the then world power- Rome.

Again, my friends, here is a lesson for us. Obviously after 2000 and more years of existence, Holy Mother Church has built up a very considerable treasury of spirituality, liturgical tradition, doctrine and theology. In the catechesis on the Mass which begins on 16th April, we shall be drawing upon a great deal of that. That's our equivalent of finding inspiration as St Peter did from the psalms. Like the early Christians, we may find that the next few years are a time of difficulty and dislocation. But, my brothers and sisters, be full of courage and hope. God has not stopped being

our sovereign lord. He has not stopped being in control of this situation.

On the contrary he is using the present challenge to wake us up and make us better equipped for mission. Just as he showered the infant Church with all the gifts it needed to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, so too he will grace us with all the gifts we need for our future mission. All we have to do is recognise that we need such gifts and ask for them.

And so finally, the command to return to Galilee. Galilee is where our Lord's mission on earth began. Here St Matthew is symbolising the fact that the Apostles had to go back to where it all began before they could truly understand their vocation. So here is our final lesson for today: we too must go back to where it all began. By this I mean, that we each of need to have a completed and restored understanding of our baptismal vocation. Only then will we be looking at the coming challenges from the right end of the telescope.

A people completely restored to holiness by the Word of God and the Sacraments; a holy people trusting utterly in the sovereign power of God and totally unafraid to step out in faith in new directions; a holy people boldly stepping out in faith and rejoicing in our baptismal vocations: this, my friends: this is what makes us the one holy Catholic and apostolic Church.