

## GOOD FRIDAY

When you stack our appointed readings up against one another, quite a contrast emerges with respect to the mouth. First, in our reading from Acts, we've got Peter commanded to teach and preach and in fact preaching and teaching. Peter is a witness; someone who uses his mouth for the sake of Christ's ongoing mission and ministry on earth. Then, in our reading from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, we have Paul writing to the Christian community at Corinth. At one point he writes, "I handed on to you as of first importance what I had in turn received." Paul has been schooled about the Good News of Jesus Christ and now he's schooling others about the same Good News. Paul is a witness; someone who uses his mouth, as well as his hand, for the sake of Christ's ongoing mission and ministry on earth. Hear the pattern. Same thing emphasized in both our first and second reading. And then the pattern is broken. In our reading from Mark, the first Easter witnesses don't become witnesses. In spite of a command to bear witness with their mouths, they say nothing at all to anyone. This is quite a contrast. It's open mouth, open mouth, closed mouth. It's almost as if we've got open tomb, open tomb, closed tomb. What's the deal here?

The deal is we've got positive and negative punctuation of the same reality. Without us and our mouths, Easter only goes so far. Without us and our mouths, the open tomb remains closed for all intents and purposes down here under the sun. And so, by way of positive or negative illustration, what we've got today can in one way be thought of as a plea; a plea to help the Church say to as many as possible, "Christ is Risen! Raise a Hallelujah with us!" But then again, what we've got before us today can also be thought of as an invitation; an invitation to use our mouths to beckon the world closer and closer to the forthcoming paradise God has promised through the empty tomb. But in the end, whether it's a plea or an invitation, the point that's punctuated today is the call to use our mouths for the sake of Jesus' ongoing mission and ministry in the world.

Pretty simple, right! Are we or are we not witnesses? Are our mouths open; keeping the tomb more open than it would otherwise be? Or are our mouths closed; rolling back the stone God has rolled away for all intents and purposes? It is pretty simple when you get down to it. But if our mouths are to be open and under the management of the Holy Spirit, what shall we say?

How about, "Everything's going to be okay. Better days are on the way?" How about, "Absolutely nothing in all of creation, not even death, shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus?" How about, "All things shall work together for good for those who love God?" These are all words of faith.

These are all words of hope. We and our neighbors need words of faith and hope now as much as ever.

By way of illustration, I recently read an article about news coverage which caught my eye. Some researches in our country recently did a study to determine where coverage of the virus was most negative. The answer: The most negative news was repeatedly encountered on national news outlets of every political persuasion right here in the United States of America. The left and the right were equally guilty of being unduly negative. One side did denial and conspiracy too often. The other side cried wolf too often; identifying wolves in good times and bad. Consider these statistics. They're rather shocking. National news outlets of all stripes in our country were two-thirds more likely to be negative than their international peers and a third more likely to be negative than medical and scientific journals. And why was this so? The researchers concluded Americans have an unusual appetite for negativity; that national news outlets of every bent are reporting what they think we want with all their the sky is falling pieces. As a Christian, I'd put it somewhat differently. I'd say our native state, our original state, is sin. Doubt, despair, and disbelief are where we're going to land and stay unless the Church, people like you and me, fill the airwaves with words of faith and hope. Let's do it.

While we're at it, let's also say this too. After "God and the good are going to win," let's say, "How can I help?" In Mark's gospel, today's featured gospel and our featured gospel until a new Church year begins in December, the Church is to be above all a servant Church. Very early on in Mark's gospel Jesus saves Simon-Peter's mother-in-law and she becomes a servant immediately thereafter. This sets up much of what is to come as Mark keeps writing and we keep reading. It sets up Jesus' declaration that he has come not to be served, but to serve; giving his life as a ransom for many. It sets up Jesus' description of the Church he desires. In his Church, the greatest of all shall be the servant of all. And since I've already mentioned one form of media today, let me mention another with regard to being a servant. You don't become a servant when you use Facebook, Twitter, and other forms of social media to pontificate on every little thing you know better than everybody else; declaring yourself to be more of an expert than the experts themselves and cutting down anyone who disagrees with you. You become a servant when you ask, "How can I help," and then follow through on what you hear in return. Words of neighborly help—we need them right now. Words of faith and hope—we need them too. But what shall condition us, what shall empower and equip us, to use our mouths to speak these words.

Our reading from Mark says it's going to be time with Jesus. In our reading from Mark, the Easter witnesses who don't become witnesses are supposed to tell the disciples where they can experience Christ and his resurrection. The implication, a rather clear one I'd say, is that time with Jesus shall bring the disciples along to the next stage in their Christian journey, with good and godly use of the mouth surely becoming a part of that journey eventually. The only problem is the disciples are never told where they can hang out with Jesus and experience the truth and power of the resurrection. What we get because of this is silence; dead silence; keep the tomb functionally closed silence. Let's not make the same mistake ourselves. Let's use our mouths to tell others and ourselves where Jesus and his resurrection can be experienced most often and that's in a church gathering like this one.

In support of this point, look no further than our reading from Acts. In this reading we're told the first disciples ate and drank with the resurrected Christ. We're told the same thing in all the gospels and also in the letter from which our second reading was drawn—St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Hmm! Christians eating and drinking with the resurrected Christ. That sure sounds like holy communion to me. The fact is the Bible is very clear on where we experience Jesus and his resurrection most often. It's in church, with church being understood as some sort of gathering around God's word and God's sacraments. And so, let's not forget to use our mouths so that Mount Calvary and other places like it no longer remain the best kept secret in town. When and if this happens, I think we can rest assured that Jesus will see to it that words of faith and hope, as well as words of neighborly service, follow. Amen!