

Cycle C 4th Sunday of Easter

Reading 1 Acts 13:14, 43-52

Paul and Barnabas continued on from Perga and reached Antioch in Pisidia. On the sabbath they entered the synagogue and took their seats. Many Jews and worshipers who were converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to remain faithful to the grace of God. On the following sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and with violent abuse contradicted what Paul said. Both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first, but since you reject it and condemn yourselves as unworthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth." The Gentiles were delighted when they heard this and glorified the word of the Lord. All who were destined for eternal life came to believe, and the word of the Lord continued to spread through the whole region. The Jews, however, incited the women of prominence who were worshipers and the leading men of the city, stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their territory. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them, and went to Iconium. The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 100:1-2, 3, 5

R. (3c) We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands; serve the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful song.

R. We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

Know that the LORD is God; he made us, his we are; his people, the flock he tends.

R. We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

The LORD is good: his kindness endures forever, and his faithfulness, to all generations.

R. We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

Reading 2 Rev 7:9, 14b-17

I, John, had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. Then one of the elders said to me, "These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. "For this reason they stand before God's throne and worship him day and night in his temple. The one who sits on the throne will shelter them. They will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them. For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Gospel Jn 10:27-30

Jesus said: "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

It was April 15, 2013 when we saw the terrible tragedy at the Boston Marathon. Thinking about that this week I was drawn to the verses of the second reading today which said, *“The one who sits on the throne will shelter them. They will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them... and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

I was a runner for many years. I immensely enjoyed training, and then running in 20 Peachtree Road Races and 5 half-marathons. Now I volunteer at the race because running is all about celebrating the human spirit. But, seeing traumatized people in such a familiar location, on such a beautiful Spring day, was impossible for my mind and heart to comprehend. Father James Martin said, “Seeing Boston damaged was like seeing a family member hurt. Familiar surroundings, laden with happy memories, suddenly became places of immense sadness.”

But, one insight of that terrible day gives us comfort...we know that we have a God who understands suffering. Everyone on that first Good Friday in Jerusalem knew suffering. When Jesus suffered and was crucified, His disciples, friends and family must have been overwhelmed with emotions. They had followed him into the great city in happiness on Palm Sunday...then were overwhelmed with sadness and fear. So were the people in Boston who had prepared for a joyous occasion...and, then were at a loss to take in all the misery. In familiar surroundings...be it Jerusalem or Boston...there was violence and loss. Father Martin said, “In this Easter season, Boston was taken back to Good Friday.”

But suffering never has the last word. I was immediately impressed with how many heroes ran into the smoke where the bomb exploded. How quickly the police took charge. How fortunate the doctors and nurses were close by to care for the injured. And, it was the small things I heard about that also were heroic and meaningful. I said a prayer of thanks when I heard about runners who after 26 miles, ran another 2 miles to donate blood at the hospital. Or, the people who opened their homes for runners to recover when the race was stopped. And, even though we were physically far away, I recognized being spiritually

linked to those people...our prayers do help. There is always the possibility of care and compassion.

This week I read an article written by a medical volunteer, Joseph Murphy, who was at the finish line when the bombs went off. "Before the bombing, I worked a lot." he said. "Between providing medical coverage at sporting events and my ongoing research and publishing efforts, I was never home. I realize now that I don't have to cram 30 years of my professional life into the next 5 years of my career. I have adjusted my workdays to be home for the important things I really took for granted. Now I pick up my kids at school most days and we have family dinner every night...there was never a moment where I didn't plan to return to the race. We are simply [going] back doing what we love to do. [But,] Rather than altering my behavior on that single day of the year, I've chosen to change how I live the other 364 days."

It may be difficult to see now, as it was impossible for the disciples on Good Friday to see, but the God who has suffered is ready to help us. The Gospel explains that God loves us so much that *"Jesus said: 'My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand.'*" Jesus is always holding us in the safety of His hand with the promise of something new. When we follow Him, He moves us, He consoles us, He urges us to help each other...help each other move beyond our blood and tears. It's what we do...not as heroes, but as Christians. That was true in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago...it is true in Boston ...and it is true right here today in Cumming, GA. Suffering never has the last word.....There is always the possibility of care and compassion.