

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER — EASTER 6 A 2011

Acts 17:22-31; Psalm66:1-4, 8-20; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

May 29, 2011

Central, Anchorage

## SEEING JESUS

Seeing Jesus. When do we see Jesus? Where do we see Jesus? How do we see Jesus?

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus gives the gift of the Holy Spirit to his disciples, his followers, his church community; he gives the Comforter and Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, "whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him," Jesus says, "because he abides with you, among you, in you. I do not leave you orphaned, stranded, desolate—I am with you. The world may not see me, but you see me." How, Where, When do we see Jesus?

Well, what do you say? How, when, where do you see Jesus? Do you see Jesus present and at work in your life, in your relationships, in this community of faith, in the world around us? Do you see the face of Jesus in your neighbors? Do you hear his voice and see him in your work, in your play, in your joys and sorrows, your pain and suffering? Notice that in 1 Peter the early Christians knew the strong presence of Jesus in their suffering, especially their suffering for doing what is right. They knew God present with them as they loved those who did them harm, as they blessed those who cursed them. Do you see Jesus in your patient suffering for doing good, for blessing when the world curses you? Do you see Jesus here? That'd be good, wouldn't it? Jesus in the Word. Jesus in the Meal. Jesus in the fellowship of the faithful, in our sisters and brothers. Does Jesus have a halo? He is enthroned or is he nailed to a cross?

To philosophers and curious bystanders in Athens, St. Paul says Jesus that "is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him." Is he also here, among us, right now? Is he in Joplin, MO? What say you? We teach that Jesus is both imminent and transcendent, present with us, as close as our own breath, but also encountering us from outside ourselves, challenging us, lest we take him for granted. Jesus is with, beside, before, behind, below, above, within us, but always free, never owned or controlled by us. Jesus is our best friend, who never forsakes us, but knows us so well that he never lets us off the hook. He calls us to account. We live because of Christ. "Because I live, you also will live."

When, where, how do we see Jesus? Are you still thinking? I dare guess that whenever and wherever we see Jesus we often see him in hindsight, as we look back on the events of our life, particularly times of stress and difficulty. Jesus is not static, not a still-life study, not stuck forever in a stained-glass window. We don't hold up a Bible and say, "Behold Jesus!" Then again, through the proclamation of the Word, the Living Word, we may indeed see Jesus. We see Jesus when the Word gets into us, starts changing us, affects the way we live, the choices we make, the way we earn and spend money, the way we treat each other, especially the poor and weak, the abused and rejected. The Word that is Jesus gets into us and changes us. The Word that is Jesus does something. Thus when the preacher is told, "Good sermon, Pastor," the wise preacher responds, "Well, that remains to be seen."

We want to see Jesus, because Jesus changes lives, right? Jesus raises us from the dead. Which, of course, means dying, doesn't it? Dying to ourselves. Getting over ourselves, beyond ourselves. We see Jesus because we are no longer gazing at ourselves, completely engrossed in ourselves.

How do we see Jesus? The Gospel text from John uses a very interesting word for the verb “to see.” The word, in Greek, is *θεωρεῖν*, from which we get the word “theory.” In a sense, how we see Jesus depends upon the image, the theory, the perception we have of Jesus. “In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me.” The world surely has trouble seeing Jesus, and we may have trouble, too, because we’re looking for a false Jesus. We not only look in the wrong places, in the wrong direction, but also with wrong assumptions and expectations? We look for a Jesus to support our prejudices; or who insures our success in love and life, our getting ahead in business and finance; or who protects us from all injury and harm. It seems clear to me that when Jesus faced his time of trial in the wilderness, he gave up the easy, fool-proof ways of winning us over. No, Jesus does not make it easy for us to believe, to see, to follow.

For one thing, he left, he departed. This next Thursday we celebrate the Ascension of Our Lord. Jesus is not with us in the same way he was with those first followers. We see him now with different eyes. Jesus is on the loose. He is risen. Where is he? He is present in the Spirit, the Spirit of Truth and faithfulness, love and fidelity. He does not leave us alone, orphaned. “Those who love me, who abide in my way of life, are loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them. Yes, you will see me; because I live, you will live also.”

A story is told of Martin of Tours, the saint for whom Martin Luther was named. In the story, Jesus came to Martin in a vision, dressed in heavenly finery. Martin surely wanted to see Jesus, but he was suspicious of this Jesus. He asked to see the marks of the nails, the wounds in Jesus’ hands and feet and also the wound in his side. In that moment, this vision of Jesus left him. But Martin was not left alone. For then Martin beheld the real Lord Jesus, clothed in a woolen tunic, the same tunic Martin had given to a poor, freezing beggar the day before.

**To God Alone Be Glory.**

**Amen.**