

## Sixth Sunday of Easter

Year A

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

Ps 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20

I Pt 3:15-18

Jn 14:15-21

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I am not sure if you saw the movie *A Few Good Men*, starring Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson, but if you did, you must certainly remember the scene when Jack Nicholson / Colonel Nathan Jessup, is being questioned by Tom Cruise / Lt. Daniel Kaffee, a Navy defense lawyer, because of the bizarre murder of a marine. Tom Cruise is demanding the truth from the character of Jack Nicholson, who he believes holds the key to the investigation. During a heated conversation, Cruise demands the truth from Nicholson. In response Jack Nicholson says, “the truth, you can’t handle the truth.”

The farther we remove ourselves from the actual celebration of Easter Sunday, the more difficult it becomes to make the necessary connections to these Easter events. Yet, we are still in the Easter season and our readings lend themselves well to re-connecting to the promises of Jesus both before and after His Resurrection. Before Christ died, He promised that – on the third day – He would rise to new life. After the resurrection, while appearing to various groups of disciples, Christ also promised to send the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. Here we might ask ourselves the same question as was posed in the movie. Can Jesus’ disciples handle the truth once He is gone and the Spirit comes? Better yet, can we?

The abiding presence of the Holy Spirit is a constant reminder that we have not been abandoned to handle this truth on our own. The Spirit is present in the lives of all believers and we, the faithful, must be living examples of that presence as we bear witness to the truth about all that Christ came to accomplish. As St. Peter said in our second reading, “Should anyone ask you the reason for this hope of yours be ready to reply, but speak gently and respectfully.”

That was then and this is now. Can we, the disciples of today, handle the truth about Christ and this hope of ours?

In our first reading from Acts, Philip had no problem handling the truth as he preached to the people of Samaria. He knew full well the risks that would come with this type of preaching, but was determined that he would have the courage to continue the mission of Christ which had been entrusted to him. Courage was one of the many gifts he received from the Holy Spirit. Peter and John later visited this newly formed Christian community and prayed that they too might receive this promise of Christ, the Spirit of truth, hoping that they could handle it and continue to proclaim that truth to the skeptics and unbelievers of their community.

As the Word of God spread rapidly in the early years after the resurrection, the disciples had no problem connecting what Jesus said and did to their ministry. The power of the resurrection was still very potent and visible in the healing works of the disciples.

But what about today, some 2000 years after the event? Easter was six weeks ago. The flowers in most churches are wilting. Is the message of the Risen Lord also wilting in our minds

and hearts? The events of the past several weeks have re-connected us to our Catholic roots as we witnessed both the death and funeral of John Paul II and the election and installation of Benedict XVI. There was no mistaking the power and presence of the Spirit in the millions who visited Rome during these days of mourning, prayer and jubilation. There was no mistaking the fulfillment of the promise that we have not been abandoned, but rather re-claimed by Christ, as a new shepherd had been quickly appointed to continue to lead God's people to the truth. The question still remains –can we handle it?

Connecting ourselves to a feast that is already passed and forgotten by some –unless you are a church goer– is not an easy task. We must constantly remind ourselves that we have been entrusted with this truth and we have the obligation to make sure that, as it was handed onto us, we hand it onto those who follow us. The truth can be challenging and disturbing. The truth can be painful or exciting. The truth has the potential to change lives as it did so often in the early Church and throughout the history of Christianity. The best part of our Christian vocation is that we must be searchers of the truth like our father Augustine. We must seek the truth always, and yet we do not search or seek alone. This Spirit that Christ promised is always with us to guide us and offer us gifts that will allow us to search and seek together as a community of believers. In his opening homily on the occasion of his installation, Benedict XVI promised to listen to God and asked us all not to be afraid. As faithful members of the Church, we hopefully seek the truth in our lives. We pray that this truth will set us free from those things that hold us back from being the individuals and community that we have been called to be.

Remember, Christ would not have sent us the Spirit of truth if we could not handle it!