

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Year A

Acts 1:12-14
Ps 27:1, 4, 7-8
I Pt 4:13-16
Jn 17:1-11a

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Television is the very definition of a mixed blessing. It is capable of sending vital information around the globe in an instant; yet, often it spreads only gossip, triviality, and rumor. It can bring us to fascinating, far-off places we will never be able to visit; yet, often it only takes us to neighborhoods we recognize all too well, where no one says anything different or intelligent or uplifting. Through it, we hear the Pope preach the good news in our nation's capital, we watch the Olympic torch move across the globe, we see creatures swim on the bottom of the sea and galaxies glow at the far reaches of the cosmos; yet, we also confront waves of vulgarity and stupidity in the form of coarse comedies, vapid dramas, and so-called "reality shows."

Indeed, in most homes with children, you can easily see both sides of this mixed blessing. On the one hand, the television has a place of honor, surrounded by chairs and couches all pointed in its direction. On the other hand, it is programmed with an access code, so that parents can exercise some control over what their children are exposed to. This is why, when I babysit my nieces and nephew, we watch seemingly endless episodes of *Hannah Montana* and *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*; but when they fall asleep, I can't watch *The French Connection* or *Alien* because the movie channels are blocked and I can never remember the code.

I don't blame my sister and her husband. A parent would have to be crazy to allow children unrestricted access to a television. Because children's minds are vacuum cleaners, sucking up everything they see and hear, and often without understanding it. And children imitate what they see and hear - sometimes for better, sometimes for worse. My nieces try to sing and dance like Miley Cyrus, and my nephew talks like Homer Simpson. That's why when I was their age, my mother banned the show *Batman*. My brothers and I would try to imitate the fights the saw, shouting "Pow!" and "Zap!" and punching one other, clobbering each other over the head leaping off stairs and tables. Not being stunt men, we were soon a mass of wounded, weeping boys. But there we were the next day, at the same Bat Time and the same Bat Channel, ready to do it all again.

Good parents want their children to have good examples, because children imitate what they see and hear. God wants us to have a good example, so that we can imitate what we see and hear. And So He sent His Son to shine forth in a sinful world. The television that gives children so many bad words and attitudes to imitate does the same for adults. There we see selfishness celebrated, excess extolled, and gossip glamorized. Television, and the movies, and books, and our neighborhoods and workplaces, and perhaps even our homes, provide us with plenty of bad examples. So God sends His Son for us to see, to hear, to imitate.

We already know a lot about how to imitate Jesus Christ. Week after month after year, we

hear him speak, we listen to his stories, we watch him call disciples and meet sinners, Samaritans, Pharisees and Gentiles. We see Jesus in action, and so we know what to do: feed the hungry, visit the sick, console the grief-stricken, work for peace, teach the truth, receive each day and every breath as a gift, live chastely, forgive, pray constantly. Every time we do these things, we look and sound like Christ.

Today, the Holy Spirit speaks to us about another way to look and sound like Christ: suffering. In the pain we endure, and how we endure it, we can imitate Jesus Christ. Saint Peter tells us that people suffer for being criminals, sinners, and busybodies, but this is not the suffering of a disciple. In today's second reading, we hear these words: "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.... But whoever is made to suffer as a Christian should not be ashamed but glorify God because of the name."

What a remarkable claim: suffering for Christ gives God glory.

There are Christians in the world who still suffer as the first disciples did: they are persecuted, imprisoned, and killed. All of us owe them our gratitude and prayers for their glorious imitation of Christ. But every follower of Christ must expect insults and pain. And so every disciple can give God glory.

When we put aside our schedules to visit the sick, cut back on our spending to aid the poor, give support to the addicted, the widowed, and the stranger, we carry the cross of service. This gives God glory.

When we defend the lives of the unborn, insist that marriage can exist only between a man and a woman, proclaim that the riches of the earth must be shared with the most needy, we carry the cross of truth. This gives God glory.

When we put away anger at a husband or wife, refuse to seek sexual pleasure in sinful ways, and do not succumb to the desire for revenge, we carry the cross of self-denial. And this gives glory to God, a glory that surpasses Mount Sinai (II Cor 3), a glory brighter than the noonday sun. For when we suffer we share in the glory of Jesus Christ.

In today's Gospel, Jesus associates his suffering with glory: "Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your son, so that your son may glorify you..." Christ recognizes that his suffering and death will give his Father glory. God Himself, beyond all pain and hardship, accepted suffering for the sake of our salvation. This is glory. When we share in his Cross, when we feel the pressure, the strain, the pinch, the bite, the blow, the curse of living as a Christian in a sinful world, we are blessed. For to be like God, to accept suffering for the sake of goodness, is always a glorious thing.

We saw the glory of God shining among us, in the form of Jesus Christ: in his miracles and parables, in his nail marks and his crown, in his Resurrection and Ascension. And whenever we suffer for the sake of the Gospel, we receive a pure blessing from the Lord, who lets Christ shine forth again in us, for men and women to see, to hear, and to imitate.