**6th Sunday of Easter – Cycle A**

Acts 8: 5-8, 14-17; 1 Pt 3: 15-18; John 14: 15-21

May 20-21, 2017

Lest we forget, we are still celebrating Easter. The fifty days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost are Easter days, days that are meant to be days of great joy for all Christians. Joy, because we know Jesus lives, that he is among us, that he is risen, that we are now one with him as the Gospel todays says.

Great hope and much joy for all of us. This joy cannot be contained. Like any joy of life, it must be shared with others. It is only natural. St. Philip in our first reading proclaimed his belief in the risen Lord and we are told, "There was great joy in that city."

Perhaps a good question for all of us today is, "Am I a joyful, hopeful Christian? Am I convinced that Jesus is alive, present, and risen? Do I share this belief with others?"

Many people are asking why so many are leaving the Church. Might it be that we aren't sharing our joy and hope with them? Why is it that Pope Francis is so attractive and convincing to people who have left the Church or have been critical of her? Because he expresses joy and hope, and does three things that St. Peter teaches us to do in the second reading.

St. Peter teaches us how to share our joy and the reason for our hope by the way we live our lives. It is more about ***living life well*** than about preaching words. What does he say? Three things:

***Give reason for our hope, but do so gently and reverently!*** Isn’t this what Pope Francis is always telling us? We must approach others, go to them and not avoid them, and do so with reverence and gentleness because Jesus loves them. They are the face of Jesus. If we act harshly or irreverently, we betray Jesus because we in effect deny that Jesus loves this person. Do we approach each other with reverence, hope, gentleness, and joy?

***Keep a clear conscience!*** Pope Francis over and over again says the same thing. A clear conscience is a joyful conscience in a state of grace. How do we remain in a state of grace? By changing our lives and going to Confession regularly. This is what Pope Francis has been saying for several years, ie, experience the mercy of God in the Sacrament of Penance. Go to Mass every Sunday. If we live with a clear conscience by confidently and regularly confessing our sins and receiving the sacrament of Penance, we will be capable of showing Jesus to others. Pope Francis reminds us that if we as individuals and as a Church acknowledge our sins and change how we treat each other, we will be joyful witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. The pope tells us that if our consciences are clouded, dark, anxious and heavy, we put a mask on Jesus’ face. We become like people leaving a funeral, downcast and dour. We disfigure the face of Jesus.We put a veil on him. A clear conscience removes that mask, lifts that veil, and renews our hope and our joy. People are attracted to a clear conscience.

***Be willing to suffer a little along the way!*** St. Peter tells us to be willing to suffer with others. Jesus himself said we have to pick up our crosses and follow. Pope Francis reminds us also. Ironically, we cannot share our joy and our hope in the resurrection of Jesus if we are not willing to share in the pain and difficulties of others. Our Holy Father says we must not avoid each other. Jesus wants to be where people hurt the worst. The big question for a lot of us is, "Will I be willing to share other people's suffering, or will I avoid it?" To share in the suffering of others does not diminish our joy or our hope. It only increases them. This is a great mystery in Christianity.

So, give reason for your hope and joy by approaching others with reverence and gentleness; keep a clear conscience by seeking forgiveness and reconciliation; and be willing to suffer with others.

We who follow Jesus in his Church must be convinced of his life, death, and resurrection. We must be filled with joy and hope. By this conviction and with this joy we will attract others to the Church, even those who have left her. The Scriptures attest to it and our Holy Father demonstrates it.

Jesus lives! He is risen! Embrace it. Live it. Proclaim it!