



Contributed by Father Raphael Ma, C.R.

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FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 2, 2021

GATHERING TIME

(10-15 Minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

There is a word that appears in both our first and second reading today, which is well worth taking a pause to consider in more detail. The word is “boldness.” The Greek word that appears in both readings is *παρρησία*, or “parrhesia.” Literally, it means “all” “speaking,” a freedom and unreservedness in speaking. This word was often considered an important element of the democracy of ancient Athens, where ordinary citizens were given the space and opportunity in assemblies to speak freely and openly, without hesitation.

But as we have seen in the recent past, merely speaking freely and openly, without hesitation, is not itself productive of democracy—in fact, it can contribute to its undermining. What is also needed is a commitment to truth. And so, we find ourselves with a dilemma, as the Athenians did, and as every democracy always will—between allowing everyone to say whatever they want, at the risk of the truth being drowned out by the loudest voice, and prioritizing those who will speak the truth, at the risk of not giving everyone a voice.

But we are not here to discuss a political problem. We are here to celebrate the Word, the one Word that the Father has spoken from all eternity, Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. And we will see in our first and second reading, this boldness in action, and in our Gospel, how this boldness can be anchored in truth.

Warm-up Activity *(about 8-10 minutes):*

Some questions to reflect on by yourself or with a group:

1. Is boldness a good thing?
2. What is a moment or what are some moments where I have been bold in my life?
3. Have I ever said or did anything bold for Jesus?
4. What holds me back?

The Table of the Word

In the Catechism, the word “parrhesia” is also mentioned, but perhaps in what appears to be a slightly different context – a liturgical one. We are reminded that at every Mass, we are invited through the power of the Holy Spirit “to dare to say” the Our Father. Being the perfect prayer, the Our Father is in a sense, “saying all”:

“The Lord’s Prayer is the most perfect of prayers. . . . In it we ask, not only for all the things we can rightly desire, but also in the sequence that they should be desired.” (CCC 2763)

But the Our Father is also a bold prayer:

“When would a mortal dare to call God ‘Father,’ if a man’s innermost being were not animated by power from on high?” (CCC 2777)

Perhaps if boldness is something you struggle with, consider that every time we pray the Lord’s prayer, that is already a kind of Gospel boldness, as the Catechism also points out:

“parrhesia, straightforward simplicity, filial trust, joyous assurance, humble boldness, the certainty of being loved.” (CCC 2778)

Penitential Rite:

Leader: “Live in me and let me live in you, says the Lord; my branches bear much fruit.”

Lord Jesus, you are the vine, we are the branches,
Lord Jesus, you cleanse us by your word and sacrament,
Lord Jesus, those who abide in you we bear much fruit,

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray: (together)

Almighty ever-living God, constantly accomplish the Paschal Mystery within us,
that those you were pleased to make new in Holy Baptism may,
under your protective care, bear much fruit and come to the joys of life eternal.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the
unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this Word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God’s Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving.)*

FIRST READING (Acts 9.26-31)

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.
When Saul had come to Jerusalem,
he attempted to join the disciples;
and they were all afraid of him,
for they did not believe that he was a disciple.

But Barnabas took him,
brought him to the apostles,
and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord,
who had spoken to him,
and how in Damascus Saul had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.
So, Saul went in and out among them in Jerusalem,
speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.
He spoke and argued with the Hellenists;
but they were attempting to kill him.
When the believers learned of it,
they brought Saul down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.
Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria
had peace and was built up.
Living in the fear of the Lord
and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit,
it increased in numbers.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (1 John 3.18-24)

A reading from the first letter of John.
Little children, let us love,
not in word or speech, but in truth and action.
And by this we will know that we are from the truth
and will reassure our hearts before him
whenever our hearts condemn us;
for God is greater than our hearts,
and God knows everything.
Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us,
we have boldness before God;
and we receive from him whatever we ask,
because we obey his commandments and do what pleases God.
And this is God's commandment,
that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ
and love one another, just as he has commanded us.
All who obey his commandments abide in him,
and he abides in them.
And by this we know that he abides in us,
by the Spirit that he has given us.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (John 15.1-8)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John. **Glory to you, O Lord.**
Jesus said to his disciples:
"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower.
He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit.
Every branch that bears fruit

he prunes to make it bear more fruit.
You have already been cleansed
by the word that I have spoken to you.
“Abide in me as I abide in you.
Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself
unless it abides in the vine,
neither can you unless you abide in me.
I am the vine, you are the branches.
Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit,
because apart from me you can do nothing.
“Whoever does not abide in me
is thrown away like a branch and withers;
such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.
“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you,
ask for whatever you wish,
and it will be done for you.
My Father is glorified by this,
that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Lectio Divina means “sacred reading.” It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This Word proclaimed today is God's own Word, God's way of speaking to you today through God's own Spirit. So take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this Word you have just heard to touch you or soak into you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a word or thought that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, simply identify it and describe it in a few words.

COMMENTARY:

First Reading:

Although we learn in the middle of our first reading (in Barnabas' recommendation of Paul to the apostles) that Paul had spoken boldly in Damascus in the name of Jesus, it is not mentioned by Barnabas that Paul suffered for his bold speaking, which was why Paul came to Jerusalem in the first place.

In the passage just before the beginning of our first reading, we learn that Paul's bold preaching, especially in light of his radical conversion from persecutor to evangelist, was very influential and eventually led to a plot on his life. His disciples upon learning of this helped Paul escape by lowering him in a basket through an opening in the city wall.

Knowing allows us to perhaps enter a little more into Paul's cool reception in Jerusalem. Here was a man who gave up his career and former way of life in order to proclaim Jesus, and even put his life at risk. Although he probably expected they would be suspicious of him, would there not have been some part of Paul hoping to receive the same kind of community and welcome in Jerusalem as he had experienced in Damascus?

And after he is able to come and go among the Christians in Jerusalem, it is curious that Paul ends up taking the same path that Stephen (to whose stoning Paul consented) took, arguing with “Hellenists,”

which were Gentile believers who had become Jews. Just like how the martyrdom of Stephen led to the believers being scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria and the evangelization of those areas, so the suffering of Paul leads to a period of peace for the Church.

Second Reading:

Our second reading brings in the notion of “truth” to the conversation on “boldness.” Love is not only a matter of words and speech – not even bold words and speech, but of truth and action. But how many of us find ourselves in reality actually committed to the truth, not in words and speech only, but in truth and action?

Here is where the author of the first letter of John brings up a new subject: “whenever our hearts condemn us,” that is, when we realize in our hearts that we are not as committed to the truth as we once thought we were. But then, we are told of a different kind of “boldness,” boldness toward God, as when we pray the Our Father.

This boldness comes from a heart that does not condemn ourselves. And this heart that does not condemn ourselves, in turn, comes from obeying God’s commandments, which the author equates with abiding in God and God in us through the Holy Spirit, which leads us to our Gospel passage.

Gospel:

Although the Gospel passage makes no mention of the word “boldness,” it does in fact deal with the source of this boldness: abiding in Jesus, and letting Him abide in us, as branches on a vine. Again, God hearing our prayers is connected, as in our second reading, to this abiding in Jesus and letting His words abide in us.

An example of the “pruning” of the branches that do bear fruit has already been seen in Paul’s suffering that we heard about in our first reading, which brought peace and new life to the Church. This pruning is also seen in realizing the gap we saw in our second reading between our love in truth and action and what we profess in word and speech, which should lead us to confidence in God’s mercy and abiding more deeply in Him. In either case, abiding in Jesus and Jesus abiding in us, is not something static, but a progression that involves purification.

(Allow 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight.)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. How would you have felt if you were St. Paul, and the Christian community in Jerusalem did not welcome you at first after all that had happened to you?
2. Are you bold with God in your prayers? Why or why not?
3. How do you abide in Jesus in your life?
4. How does Jesus abide in you in your life?

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

1. **Word of the Week:** "...And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us."
2. **Suggestion for the Week:** Pray to the Holy Spirit for boldness this week, like the first Christians.
3. **Intercessions:** (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

Leader: We bring our prayers and petitions to God, who hears whatever we ask Him.

That the Church around the world will proclaim Jesus with boldness, we pray to the Lord...

That those who are struggling, physically, mentally, and/or financially during the pandemic may experience Jesus abiding with them, we pray to the Lord...

For those in leadership positions, that they may be open to collaboration, we pray to the Lord...

That we will abide in Jesus, bear fruit, and become His disciples, we pray to the Lord...

For those who have died, that they may abide forever in God's kingdom, we pray to the Lord...

How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray (together)

Graciously be present to your people,
we pray, O Lord,
and lead those you have imbued
with heavenly mysteries
to pass from former ways
to newness of life.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one,

OUR FATHER ...

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (Celebrating the Word was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R. deceased 2012). For information: **website:** www.resurrectionists.ca. **Email:** provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca
The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).