

Homily.2EasterA.4.16.23
Saint Bernard Church
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WHY DID JESUS START A CHURCH?

Why did Jesus start a church? And what is the Catholic Church's fundamental objective?

There are different ways to answer these questions. I'm going to use our readings this morning to explain a basic way of understanding the role of the Catholic Church that is not understood as clearly as it should be.

First of all, our readings this morning place a clear emphasis on those who have not seen Jesus.

In the second reading, from the 1st Letter of Peter, we are told: "Although you have not seen him [Jesus] you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him."

Then, in the Gospel, as part of his dialogue with Thomas, Jesus says "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

So, have you seen Jesus? I haven't seen him. Nobody I know has seen him. So these references to those who have not seen Jesus and yet believe in him apply to all of us.

The next passage I want to draw your attention to is from the first part of today's Gospel from John. Jesus has resurrected from the dead. The disciples, motivated by fear, have locked the doors to the room where they are meeting.

Jesus enters the room and says: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Then he breathes on them, gives them the Holy Spirit and entrusts them with the power to forgive sins.

Most of our Protestant brothers and sisters have a big problem with the idea of confessing sins to a priest. They would say: "Why would I confess my sins to a priest when I can just ask Jesus to forgive me?"

There are a lot of good answers to this question. But what I want to address is the connection between Jesus giving the disciples the power to forgive sins and the fundamental purpose of the Catholic Church.

In John's Gospel, Chapter 14, Verse 18, Jesus tells the apostles, "I will not leave you orphans."

What does He mean by that?

Well, first of all, it means that He is going to send the Holy Spirit to them, who He says "will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you."

But there's another meaning to what Jesus says about not leaving His followers as orphans, and this is the main point of my comments this morning.

Jesus knew that, after He ascended into heaven, His followers would not see Him again. So He formed the Church and gave the Holy Spirit to the Church so that future Christians would not be victims of history. We would not be penalized by the fact that we weren't physically present with Jesus when He walked the earth.

He formed the Church for the primary purpose of making available to you and me, almost 2,000 years after He ascended into heaven, everything that He taught and everything that He did when He walked the roads of Israel.

Everything He taught has been passed down to us through our priests and deacons, all of whom have taken a vow to be faithful to the authentic teachings of Jesus in the earliest days of the Church.

The power of everything He did has been passed down to us through the sacraments of the Church.

He was with His disciples when they were baptizing others, so we have the sacrament of Baptism.

Jesus, just as in today's Gospel, gave His followers the Holy Spirit, so we have the sacrament of Confirmation.

Jesus healed, so we have the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

Jesus forgave sins, so we have the sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession.

He called and formed the apostles, and so we have the sacrament of ordaining priests and deacons.

And, at the top of the list, Jesus gave His apostles His body and blood, and so He gave us the sacrament of the Eucharist.

This is what is so beautiful, powerful and unique about the Catholic Church. Only the Catholic Church can give you today what Jesus gave His followers 2,000 years ago.

Even though we don't see Jesus, we believe in Him and that He is still present with us through the Church which He established.

As Saint Peter wrote in his First Letter:

“Jesus divine power has bestowed on us everything that makes for life and devotion, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and power. Through these,

he has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature...”

Pope Saint Leo the Great captured this mystery in these words:

“And so all that the Son of God did and taught for the world’s reconciliation is not for us simply a matter of past history. Here and now we experience his power at work among us.”

So if someone asks us why we’re Catholic, perhaps the best response is to say that Jesus established the Catholic Church so that all of His teachings and power could be passed down through history. In the words of St. Peter, where else would we go?

Brothers and sisters, we have a unique, special privilege of experiencing Jesus in a deeper, richer way as Catholics than would be available in any other form of Christianity.

If we take advantage of the mysterious, powerful presence of Jesus in the Catholic Church, we can be assured that someday we will see Him face to face.