

Homily Easter 6 Year A

1st Reading Acts 17:22-31

Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said,

‘For we too are his offspring.’

Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

The Gospel

John 14:15-21

Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

”I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

Prayer: "May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord our rock and our redeemer."

Homily:

Today is National Pack Rat Day? ⁱ I feel like a pack rat!
All cooped up. ⁱⁱ

The newspapers and the Internet tell us there's a lot of
Grumbling and finger pointing and impatience.

Some of us are surely thinking: "I'd like to get away, for a while."
But where do we go?
And how do we get back home,
Once we've gotten to wherever that place is?

Somehow amongst all of the drama and talk,
I was reminded of an old cartoon show,
Starring Tooter Turtle and Mr. Wizard.ⁱⁱⁱ

Tooter Turtle's crazy adventures always went bad.
In the last moment he'd cry out, "*Help me, Mr. Wizard*".

And Mr. Wizard would rescue Tooter, saying:
"Drizzle, Drizzle, Druzzle, Drome;
Time for this one to come home."

Mr. Wizard always had the same advice for Tooter Turtle.
Tooter didn't really want to hear that advice,
and neither do we. *But it is worth hearing.*^{iv}

"Be just what you is, not what you is not.
Folks what do this has the happiest lot."

So, for these days, *do be yourself*.
But please stay home.
Just a little while longer!

And, meanwhile, let's unpack today's 1st reading,
from the Book of Acts.

St. Paul is in Athens, standing on a big rock outcropping,
called the Areopagus, near the Acropolis. ^v

Athenians had been gathering there for generations,
To engage in the conversations
for which Greeks were famous.

There were a bunch of statues of Greek gods,
On the top of the Areopagus,
But it wasn't a holy place.

The statues were there to show respect to the gods,
in case it mattered.

St. Paul, was an educated and erudite man.
He understood why the Greeks came to the Areopagus.
He was well aware of the Greek's cautious habit of
building a statue to the "unknown" God.

Paul knew that most Greeks didn't take their gods seriously.
The statue to the unknown god was insurance.
Athenians didn't want to get on the bad side of
some god they never heard of. ^{vi}
And there were so many gods! ^{vii}

The Greeks were probably more superstitious, and more scared,
then they were religious.^{viii}

Paul knew that while some people feared the gods,
Nobody loved them or expected to be loved by them.

Paul knew that the Athenians erected the
Statue to the Unknown God, out of fear^{ix} and not respect.

Paul knew that the Greeks were no more “religious”
than our politicians are.^x
Crossing every “T” and dotting every “I”,
While cutting deals at the National Prayer Breakfast.

So, when Paul said, “Athenians... you are “extremely religious”^{xi}
He knew how skeptical they were.

The people of Athens didn't think that their gods “loved” them.^{xii}
They didn't imagine that any god cared much
about people. Or animals. Or the earth.

But, 2000 years later, the world is full of folks
who say they love God
and who believe that God loves them.

We do love God.

But are we *confident that God loves us?*

Do we act like people who believe in God's love?

We do pray. At least we say we do. Most of us, anyway.

But is praying mostly a “back up” to our own daily plans?

“God Helps Those Who Help Themselves”, we like to say.^{xiii}

God is our back-up plan, when our own efforts fail!

We plan our lives based on what we read in the papers,
or on the Internet or on FaceBook or on Twitter,
and not on our faith in God's mighty hand.

Does that look like people who are confident of God's love?

Some folks were raised in homes
where God is viewed as temperamental and irritable.

Whether Baptist or Catholic or Bible Believing,
Burning in Hell for all eternity is a real threat.
Sin is a big problem.

The Bible says

“It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God”,^{xiv}

But, that is just one phrase in a thick, complex book.
God has lot more patience then we think.

Meanwhile, some folks want to see only a loving God.
Jesus and the little children.

Other folks can see only a God who, like the Greek gods,
Seems bored, trifling, and indifferent.^{xv}

These are pieces of a puzzle.

A kaleidoscope.

None of these are God.

Jesus said:^{xvi}

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. ...

If you know me, you will know my Father....”

To know God we must know Jesus. ^{xvii}

Our brother, our friend, our guide, and our Savior!

- Is God like a Greek statue? **NO**
- Is God a mysterious person in heaven, who loves us, looks after us, and gives us rules to live by? **Yes**
- Does God push us, to be better? **Yes**
- Will God say to Peter, when you arrive at the Heavenly Gates, “*Let this one in*”? **Yes**

God is not an absentee landlord.

God is present every moment in our everyday life.

God is neither legalistic, nor bored, nor trifling, nor indifferent.

God is patient, creative, imaginative, orderly, and loving.

God is the Creator who cares and loves.

God is not a harsh judge. God is a friend.

God will be as actively engaged in our lives, as we allow. ^{xviii}

God abides.

1 God moves in a mysterious way
his wonders to perform;
he plants his footsteps in the sea,
and rides upon the storm.

3 Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
the clouds ye so much dread
are big with mercy, and shall break
in blessings on your head. ^{xix}

-AMEN

ⁱ At least according to the Internet. So It Must Be True!

ⁱⁱ “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7)

ⁱⁱⁱ You’ve seen it!

^{iv} It made sense to me as a little boy. It still makes sense today.

^v The Areopagus is a big rock outcropping near the Acropolis in Athens. “Pagus” means “big rock”; the reference to Areios may have been a reference to the God Ares (Ἄρειος Πάγος). The Romans called it Mars Hill.

^{vi} Most of us don’t want to be on God’s bad side.

^{vii} The Greek gods were jealous and envious of one another. They were sexist too. There is no mention of a statue to an unknown goddess!

^{viii} So, what did Paul mean when he said they were “religious”?

^{ix} But Athens was, by then, 400 years past its prime, when the great philosophers and heroes like Pericles and Demosthenes, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Sophocles, and Euripides made their mark. While Athens was still a town well known for education, the political power had moved to Corinth, to which Paul was *en route*.

^x Except maybe Mitt Romney, a faithful adherent to the LDS church.

^{xi} *And maybe they were*. See, δεισιδαιμονεστέρους (deisidaimonésteros, dice-ee-dahee-mon-es'-ter-os) which can mean, on the one hand, more religiously faithful than others, but on the other hand, too superstitious. See, https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's_G1174 (NIV)

^{xii} Well some of the God’s loved pretty girls. But we won’t get into that!

^{xiii} At least some of us. At least some of the time.

^{xiv} If you take it out of context, it is easy to misunderstand God’s role in our lives. That is not the kind of God you want around, when your plans don’t work out! That sounds more like the ancient Greek gods than it is does our idea of a loving and patient and endlessly kind Father, as reflected in Jesus of Nazareth! See, Hebrews 10:31 (NLT).

^{xv} Other folks see only an empty space. At least that is what they *say*.

^{xvi} John 14:1-14

^{xvii} “What is God like?” To get the right answer, we have to ask the right question.

^{xviii} How often do we ask God to get involved in our lives? St. Paul’s God didn’t need to be asked! Don’t you know that the God of Creation has been involved from the start, and will never let go!

^{xv} God moves in a mysterious way. William Cowper (1774)