

# Thursday April 23, 2020

## Acts 5:27-33

When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, saying, 'We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us.' But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, so that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.'

When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.

## John 3:31-36

The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony. Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true. He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath.

New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA)

## Reflection

Normally I would only use one reading on a Thursday morning but as these were so short and complement one another so well, I decided to use them both. To get a feel for these readings, we really need to consider them in reverse order to how we read them. First we need to hear the words of Jesus and then the words of Peter before the council.

Jesus says, “[t]he one who comes from above is above all,” twice as the beginning of the first two sentences. Here, Jesus refers to himself - the one from above is above all. All what? Well everything really. Jesus clarifies this when he says, “the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things.” This means those who are born of the earth cannot fully grasp all things from heaven.

Think about your school days. Sometimes our teachers said things that made absolutely no sense at all. We didn’t understand it and so we reverted to things we did know. But if we consider the words of the teacher as we grew, we begin to understand there is more than our basic knowledge and (hopefully) we push ourselves to understand. Just when we think we get there, we find that actually there is more we need to know and understand. In effect we are learning to stretch ourselves beyond just what we are taught and to examine more carefully the teaching.

Sometimes this challenges authority and more often than not authority don’t like this stretching because it is uncomfortable and because it occasionally breaks known rules or regulations. So when we heard Peter boldly asserting the authority of Jesus in the temple to the high priest, it is little wonder that the high priest was distressed. The law had become the all important part of the temple religious life when Peter stood and boldly declared, “We must obey God rather than any human authority....” Now Peter was disobeying the law as such, in fact he was challenging the perception of the temple priests saying that God is more important than any rules we have made up to govern our religious life, our faith, our way of being when we were baptised or confirmed acknowledging God is Lord of all.

What rules we do have, are to ensure good order and peace among the people of God. They are to ensure that all we do gives glory to God and not to ourselves because our worship is focussed on God through Jesus Christ, whom these priests had hung on a cross (tree) but the power of God raised from the dead, “...so that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” Peter continues, “[a]nd we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.”

What are we witness to? The risen Christ for the repentance and forgiveness of sins of the people. This is why confession is an important part of our worshipping life. It is through the Holy Spirit we are able to come close to God. Let us pray for the release of our sin to God, toward others and know God more deeply in our learning. Amen.