Easter 4(2024)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**:

On Thursday the Church commemorated St. Mark the Evangelist. Mark was the son of a woman named Mary who was very active in the Jerusalem church, which appears to have met in her house on a number of occasions. Mark was also the nephew of the Apostle Barnabas.

While Matthew and John were apostles and John part of Jesus' inner circle, the Gospel of **Mark** is critical because of how it was written. Scholars consider it the **first** Gospel. St. Mark apparently was asked by others in the Church to write down a biography of Jesus' ministry. When finished Peter no doubt approved of its use in the fledgling Church.

For information Mark relied upon the Prince of the Apostles, Peter himself. In his preaching Peter would recall the very words and body language in explaining Jesus' teaching. Thus, Mark's Gospel recounts aspects not in any other Gospel. It is almost as if Peter is reminiscing, maybe with tears at times, about Jesus. While other Gospels recount the storm at sea and Jesus asleep in the boat, Mark has him asleep... on a **pillow**.

While never mentioned by name in the Gospels, it is believed that Mark incorporated himself into his Gospel in the telling of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. We might recall that in his account when all the commotion begins a young lad escapes naked from being taken losing his loincloth.

Mark went on Barnabas and Saul's first trek, but at some point cut-out short for reasons still not definite, although it might have been a case of**:** if you can't stand the heat get out of the kitchen. When the next trek was getting planned Barnabas wanted to bring Mark again and Paul refused. He regarded Mark a “quitter”. This led to a quarrel and the breakup of Paul and Barnabas as a team.

Mark, however, seems to have redeemed himself later on. Near the end of his life when Paul is very near the point of execution he instructs Timothy to bring Mark along because he will be useful to the ministry. Thus, one of the last people St. Paul hoped to see before dying, was Mark.

After the death of Ss. Paul and Peter, the Apostles split up to proselytize the world. While not an official Apostle, Mark went to Alexandria meeting with goodly success until of course he met his end**:** being dragged through the streets by the neck.

The Coptic church uses the Markian liturgy, which in the recitation of Psalms uses **sound effects** where the words suggest a sound or a noise. It also claims that Mark’s head is preserved there in their shrine, but that the rest was stolen away in the 800s to Venice. In its boat ride across the sea (to prevent Muslim pirates from capturing it) the remains reputedly were covered in a layer of pork.

*“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”*

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At this point a little Easter recap is in order. The Easter' season Gospels revolve around **twin** themes. The first ones, covering the Octave --the first eight days--tell stories relating to that first Easter day. We heard of the arrival of the women to anoint the body, of Peter and John running then to the tomb; Easter Monday and Tuesday tell, respectively, of his appearance on the road to Emmaus, and of his appearance that evening to his frightened followers.

Three weeks back on the Octave day we heard another account of that appearance before that first Easter evening. The Gospels which have come since, the Good shepherd last week and today, and the next two Sundays' all are preparing his disciples for his physical departure.

Last week's Gospel came from the middle of the Sixteenth chapter of St. John which is nicknamed Jesus' "farewell discourse". "Ye shall weep but the world shall rejoice". In it he pretty clearly tells his followers that they will not see him with their **eyes** much longer. This theme of disappearing soon from sight is also in today's Gospel and next Sunday’s as well.

Now this beautiful passage which I re-read a few minutes ago from James the Just's Epistle, proclaiming that "every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights" stresses that God is **different** from everything else. HE does **not** change.

**We** change; the **Grand Cany**on changes; even "the lights" –God’s **stars**-- change and go supernova. But God does **not** change. Likewise what He gives us is unchanging. It is always good. It is always best for us. We may not understand; but, He who exists outside of time and does not change, he does understand.

In our world where change is rapid, continual, and everywhere, knowing that God does not change can and should be an anchor in our life and to our faith. When tossed about by the tides of daily life we can relax by seeking His help knowing that his aid is **assured** and will be **sound**, even if we don't understand or immediately appreciate it.

And, when our boat of life is overwhelmed we can always return to the safety and quiet of His **port**. In a world that denies truth God proclaims to **be** the truth. The truth of an unchanging, loving us to death God formed the trust which grew the faith which strengthened the Apostles and Evangelists in the first Century.

The safety and quiet of God’s port enabled countless saints, those on the calendar and those known only to family and friends, to turn away their unruly wills and affections from the world, enduring sufferings and martyrdom, and fix their hearts where true joys are to be found. Amen. +