

Reading for Weekday in the Fifth Week of Easter

4th May 2024

1st Reading: Acts 16:1-10

Timothy, a half-Jew, joins Paul in the missionary work

Paul went on to Derbe and to Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and had him circumcised because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. As they went from town to town, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily.

They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

Responsorial: Psalm 99: 1-3, 5

R./: Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.

Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Serve the Lord with gladness.
Come before him, singing for joy. (R./)

Know that he, the Lord, is God.
He made us, we belong to him,
we are his people, the sheep of his flock. (R./)

Indeed, how good is the Lord,
eternal his merciful love.
He is faithful from age to age. (R./)

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia, alleluia!
The Lord, who hung for us upon the tree,
has risen from the tomb.
Alleluia!

Gospel: John 15:18-21

Servants are not greater than their master. Disciples must not expect an easy time

Jesus said to his disciples,

“If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, *Servants are not greater than their master*. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.”

Short reflection on the reading for today

Paul often mentions the problems and conflicts he had to meet when going about his apostolic work. We are likely to have met our own share of difficulties in life, not least the recent experience of anxiety and confinement during the Covid-19 virus emergency. When faced with issues that could discourage us, we can take inspiration from the example of St Paul. Rejected in one place, he would move on to another, so the gospel continued to filter out to new areas. If objectors put road-blocks in the way of his mission, he saw it as a blessing in disguise. He wanted to preach the Gospel in “Asia” (western Turkey) but something forced him to change plans; and he interpreted this as being “were prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching the message.” Even the jealousy and quarrels that later divided the church in Corinth did not make him give up. A solution was found for every problem and the Gospel message continued to spread.

It may seem odd that Paul felt it right to have Timothy circumcised before taking him on as a mission-companion. This came after the Council of Jerusalem had decreed that new converts from paganism did not need this Jewish ritual. But in Timothy’s case, Paul felt that he should have this ritual to avoid future controversy, because his mother was a Jewess who had neglected to have her son circumcised in childhood. After some sophisticated reasoning on Paul’s part he persuaded young Timothy to be circumcised, so as not to scandalise the Jews of that region!

Later, when Paul and his companions crossed the Dardanelles into Europe they understood this as God *calling them* to go to Macedonia. It was a key decision that led to the message of Jesus being brought for the first time to Europe. The centre of the Jesus movement was about to move northward and westward, first to Greece and then to Rome. Whatever reasons motivated Paul’s coming over to Europe, he was convinced that the impulse came from the Holy Spirit.

In the Gospel Jesus predicts that both he and his followers will meet with hatred. “I have chosen you out of the world, and therefore the world hates you.” He clearly saw that disciples who spoke openly about their faith would have to endure hostility from non-believers. Yet, he wanted his followers to respond with love and compassion, just as God treats us.

The phrase “A servant is not greater than his master,” can be read in two ways. One is, “if the master is ill-treated so will the servants be.” The other way is, “if the master washed the servants’ feet, the servants must do likewise for each other. By saying “a servant is not greater than his master” Jesus gives us food for thought. We must depend on the Holy Spirit’s guidance, to be like the master in every respect.