

5th Monday of Easter “The Lord Can Transform Our Failures”

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We are still in John chapter 14, in Jesus’s Last Supper Discourses, and Jesus makes it clear to his disciples that simply saying we love God isn’t enough. Our love for God must look like something. It looks like following the commandments. This is why I have a sign in my office “The Ten Commandments Are Not Ten Suggestions”. I find that this simple message can be very helpful to about 75 percent of the people who come in there asking for advice. Loving God looks like following his will. Having said that, it isn’t always that easy as we all know.

I am so entertained by the first reading from Act of the Apostles. It is almost like a scene from Monty Python and it underscores that no matter how good your intentions are as you go out to pursue God’s will in life, sometimes things just don’t go as you expect. In this instance, Paul and Barnabas arrive in Athens to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is what they were commanded to do by the Risen Lord, and obviously they were very good at it. And so they arrive in Athens feeling pretty experienced, having proclaimed the Gospel in a number of other areas with success. Well, the problem is, they are so very polished in their presentation that disaster unfolded. The people ended up thinking Paul and Barnabas were manifestations of Zeus and Hermes. Total fail. Paul and Barnabas tear their garments when they hear of this, shouting to the crowd, “Stop. We are human beings like you. We are trying to invite you to a relationship with Jesus”. And no matter what they say, the people start offering sacrifices to them like they were pagan gods. For Paul and Barnabas it is a total face palm moment. And it is very entertaining to me as it is instructive.

I think most of here today, physically or in spirit, are probably pretty good about following God’s commandments in our life. Or, at the very least, I believe that we are all people who at least truly desire this even when we fail. However, even on our best behavior, we can all have our moments when we set out to follow God’s will that day, and despite all our efforts, things go awry or even end up in disaster. And yet, it good to remember that God can make something out of our failures. God is that powerful. As difficult as that day was for Paul and Barnabas, Athens to this day has a lot of Christians in it. God can make good on our failings. In fact, when I do my examination at night, this is invariably a prayer I make before going to bed. “Lord, please make good on my failings.” You see, loving God does in fact look like something...and Newsflash, loving the Lord is not really about our successes or failures, loving Jesus is not about great deeds or making profound sacrifices. It is more about offering the Lord a pure and contrite. God can do the rest.