

6th Wednesday of Easter “Mysterious Ways”
Fr. Frank Schuster
May 20, 2020

Our Gospel reading has Jesus encouraging his disciples that the Holy Spirit is coming to guide them and to take heart. Jesus is short on the details though. It is all rather mysterious and it wouldn't be until after the resurrection that the disciples would understand. It reminds me of a song I like on U2's album Achtung Baby. It is a catchy song about the Holy Spirit moving in “Mysterious Ways”. Now, don't get me wrong, I am not a fan of all of their politics, but I do enjoy the spiritual undertones in some of their music.

A classic example of how the Spirit moves in mysterious ways is the first reading about St. Paul preaching at the Areopagus in Athens. It is a famous sermon in that he tries to help the Athenians grasp the concept of monotheism by pointing to the statue of the “Unknown God”. As famous as the sermon was...it could be also be argued that it was one of his greatest fails. At the end of the sermon, the Acts of the Apostles recounts that, “When they heard about resurrection of the dead, some began to scoff, but others said, ‘we should like to hear you on this some other time.’” It would seem the best Paul could get from the crowd was faint praise. However, he won over the hearts of a couple people there...one was a young man named Dionysius.

And here is how the Spirit works in mysterious ways. St. Paul probably went back to his tent shaking his head wondering what went wrong that day. And yet, he probably didn't realize how profound a seed he planted in this young man's heart. You see, after Paul's sermon, Dionysius' heart is now on fire for Jesus. He wants to learn everything about him so he travels to Jerusalem to do just that. He spent his time with the Apostles, Saint Luke and even our Blessed Mother so to learn as much as he can about the Lord. In time, he returns to Athens and is installed by the Apostles as Athens' first bishop. His career is interesting in that, he had so much success in converting people to Christianity that the pagan priests began to conspire to take his life. Dionysius travels to Rome to get advice from Pope Clement. However, instead of returning to Athens, Pope Clement sent him north into Gaul (and area that would become known as France) to a growing town ripe for evangelization called Letetia. Well, Letetia would eventually become the city of Paris. And so, not only was Dionysius the first bishop of Athens...he was also the first bishop of Paris. It was here that he was eventually martyred for the faith on a hill that was named in memory of that day, Montmartre...which is a pilgrimage site to this day. In time St. Dionysius, or St. Denis as some call him, would become first of the 14 Holy Helpers whom I preached about not too long ago. Recall that the good people of the Middle Ages had a devotion to the 14 Holy Helpers as intercessors against plague.

I mention St. Dionysius simply because when St. Paul preached at the Areopagus in Athens, by all accounts on the ground in was a failure. Most rejected what he had so say, only a few indicated that they would be open to hearing him speak more...at another time. What a disaster. However, a young man named Dionysius was moved to conversion that day. And now you know the rest of the story. The Spirit moves in mysterious ways. What I think this can mean for us today is to perhaps consider all the moments in our past that, by all accounts, might have

been interpreted as a failure. We could then consider how the Holy Spirit may have used these failures to help mold us into the people we are today...and maybe helped other people as well. Who knows? Grace can do that. Like the Exultet we proclaim on Easter Vigil, "Oh happy fault that gained for us so great a Redeemer". God can take even our faults and change them into a blessing. The Holy Spirit moves in mysterious ways.