

April 19 - Saturday

"Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Believe in God, believe also in me.

John 14:1

A troubled heart costs a lot. Yesterday, the BBC featured a news item involving a \$5 M donation to The Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles for research on heart problems among women. It was noted that nearly 500,000 women die each year from heart problems while most research were focused on men. By the way, the donation comes from Barbara Striesand.

The Bible is concern about heart problems too, both for women and men. The Bible however understood the heart not purely as an organ that pumps the blood. When it speaks about the heart, it goes beyond circulation, cholesterol and other problems that we address today through pills and other medications. The heart (kardia) from a biblical perspective is the *"fountain and seat of the thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, endeavours."* (Greek Lexicon G2588). It is from this perspective that Jesus addresses us with these words - *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.* Our inner disposition, our spiritual health affects our heart as a physical organ and it defines our way of responding to what happens around us. Jesus said it clearly in Luke 6:45, *"The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks."* We take good care of our hearts for it affects us. In fact, symptoms of a troubled heart are evident through the words that we speak deep from within us.

The antidote of a troubled heart is faith, defined as a conviction, a sense of trust in God, in Jesus. In her book, *"Digging Deep, Unearthing Your Creative Roots Through Gardening"* Fran Sorin speaks about the joy of planting especially when you see the garden that you envisioned blooms. But she also noted that there are disappointments, at times plants die for no apparent reason. And she said, *"acceptance is a big part of the game, because*

ultimately, we are not in charge. Much as we like to think we control everything, we don't." This is true in our lives as well, we are not in control – God is in control. This is what Jesus wanted to convey to us, do not let your hearts be troubled, trust me, I am in control.

Prayer:

*O Lord, our God
calm down my troubled heart
speak to me gently your word of comfort -
'trust me, I am in control.' Amen.*

April 18 - Friday

*Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.
1 Peter 2:10*

Looking at old pictures fascinate a lot of people. It comes in different forms – old postcards, calendars, magazines among others. I saw old postcards of the city where I grew up depicting a spot called Divisoria. Viewing it spark not only memories but also the realization there are a lot of changes that continue to happen even today. There were buildings that were turned down or had been converted into different use. The *kalesa* (horse drawn cart) are all gone, the old automobiles are now replaced with fancy cars.

Peter called our attention to remember the past and see where we are right now. It's like looking at old pictures and postcards. He reminds us using contrast and comparison - *Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* Viewing pictures, history or events on a larger perspective always require a point of departure – that spot where you begin and later look back from a

vantage point. This is also true with our faith in God. The point of departure may come through our “conversion” experience, the “aha” or the “wow” moment – all giving signal that from then on life is moving in a different direction. We look back and see that indeed long-lasting changes are happening. The lines of the enduring hymn Amazing Grace captured clearly the point of departure for many of us – “*I was once lost but now am found was blind but now I see.*” Pause for a moment and take time to look back at the point of departure of your faith journey and give thanks to God for reclaiming your life and leading you to where you are right now.

Prayer:

*Thank you God
for reclaiming and for being merciful to me.
Amen.*

April 17 - Thursday

*But you are a chosen race,
a royal priesthood,
a holy nation, God's own people,
in order that you may proclaim
the mighty acts of him
who called you out of darkness
into his marvelous light.*

1 Peter 2:9

There were a lot of legendary stories circulating about the conquests of Alexander the Great. He was described as a mighty ruler and a great strategist capturing vast tracts of territory in a short period of time. In one of his conquests, one soldier was tried for failure to defend his partner in a combat. During the trial, Alexander asked the soldier; “what is your name?” The soldier replied, “Alexander, your honor.” Alexander the Great was stunned. He looked at the soldier intently and said, “You better

change your name or change your conduct!”

Like Alexander the Great, we also expect consistency. What we are called and how we behave should correspond otherwise we will not be true to who we are. In the early days of Protestant mission in the Philippines, converts were distinguished by their character and the conduct of their lives. Any misdemeanor will cause people to raise their eyebrows and say in cebuano “*balo-balo portes!*” (I thought you are a Protestant!) assuming a set of high standard among those who claim the faith.

Now Peter reminds us of our identity - *a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people*. If you notice these terms are not individual but a collective identity describing who we are as a church. So we are responsible to God as we are responsible to each other for our conduct as God’s people. As part of the race, the priesthood, the nation and God’s own people – each of us is expected to behave according to our identity – to proclaim the mighty acts of him (Christ) who called us from darkness to light!

When we gather to worship, when we serve others, when we walk a second mile, when we speak on behalf of the poor and the oppressed, when we advocate peace and justice, when we offer our gifts joyfully, when we love unconditionally, when we take up our cross obediently – these are but some of the ways that we proclaim the mighty acts of Christ consistent of our identity as God’s own people. So let us remember who we are and live according to our identity.

Prayer

*You called us O God for a purpose
to proclaim the mighty acts of Christ
keep us true and faithful to our calling. Amen.*

April 16 - Wednesday

*To you then who believe, he is precious;
but for those who do not believe,*

*"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very head of the corner,"
and "A stone that makes them stumble,
and a rock that makes them fall."
They stumble because they disobey the word,
as they were destined to do.*

1 Peter 2:7-8

The United States Postal Service issued a 24 cent stamp on May 1918 to inaugurate a new air service that carried the mails between Washington DC, Philadelphia and New York City. This issue featured the image of a Curtiss Jenny, the biplane that transported the mails. On the day the stamp was sold to the public, Mr. W.T. Robey, a stamp collector went to his Post Office and asked the teller for the new issue. The teller handed him one sheet of the 24 cent Curtiss Jenny stamp. This particular sheet should not have been sold. It should have been rejected right after printing because the image of the plane was inverted. As they say, the rest is history, on October 2005, a block of four with its plate number of this 24 cent stamp was sold for \$2,970,000. (wikipedia.org)

The theme about the reject yet turned out to be valuable was first mentioned in Psalms 118:22, "*The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.*" Jesus himself used this image in the Parable of the Landlord, the Tenants and the Landlord's Son recorded in the 3 gospels (Matthew 21:33-42, Mark 12:1-12, Luke 20:9-17), implying that he himself is the rejected son. Paul made it clear in his letter to the Ephesians that "*Christ Jesus is himself is the cornerstone!*" (2:20)

This is our testimony of faith, for us who believe in Jesus – ***he is precious!*** At first glance, the stamp that was sold to Mr. Robey appears to be like any other stamps to those who were not into Philately, the world of stamp collecting. In fact, many find it odd that there are folks who enjoy looking at small pieces of papers called as stamps. But upon seeing the inverted Jenny stamp, Mr. Robey knew immediately its immense value. The experience of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior rests deep in our hearts. This is the message that we convey not only through our words but

through the light that glows from our life. He who is rejected by many is precious to us!

Prayer

*Lord Jesus, you are precious to us.
May others see that preciousness in us
so that they will also believe in you. Amen*

April 15 - Tuesday

*Come to him, a living stone,
though rejected by mortals
yet chosen and precious in God's sight,
and like living stones,
let yourselves be built into a spiritual house,
to be a holy priesthood,
to offer spiritual sacrifices
acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
For it stands in scripture:
"See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him
will not be put to shame."*

1 Peter 2:4-6

One of the highlights of our Confirmation Class this year was the overnight retreat at The Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine at Amsterdam Avenue. This Cathedral is the seat of the Anglican Bishop in the Diocese of New York. Part of the Nightwatch Program which our youth attended was a tour of the Cathedral. Walking through the corridors of this elegant and gigantic building one cannot help but ask how did they build this place – rocks and stones – massive stones, quarried, cut, polished, laid out in layers rising up to the heavens.

Peter also walked in the corridors of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, the one that was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. He also felt that sense of majesty and beauty of a building designed to inspire that sense of awe, wonder and worship. All made possible because of the stones laid out by workers.

Using that image of building construction, Peter invited us to think of Jesus as the cornerstone. It is the most important part of the building because it supports the weight of the whole structure. It is from the cornerstone where other stones are filed up. Jesus also used this imagery when he said to Peter, “*on this rock I will build my church*” (Matthew 16:18). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul also used the image to describe our relationship to Jesus, he said, “*...you are members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.*” (Ephesians 2:19b-20)

Peter has twofold invitation: “come to him and let yourself be built into a spiritual house.” Like a stone in the cathedral we allow the Master Builder and the Great Architect to cut and trimmed and polished and then use us to become part and parcel of the great structure that will remind the people of the greatness and the grace of God.

In the tour at St. John’s the Divine, our guide reminded us that the Cathedral is still unfinished, there are various construction work going on. That was also a theological statement – God is not finished yet in building us. The New Living Translation render verse 5 this way, “*...now God is building you, as living stones, into his spiritual temple.*” Rejoice in the privilege, you had been chosen to become part of the great temple construction.

Prayer:

*Shape and polished me O God
like the stones in hands of the Master Builder.
And use me in your construction work. Amen.*

April 14 - Monday

*Like newborn infants,
long for the pure, spiritual milk,
so that by it you may grow into salvation –
if indeed you have tasted
that the Lord is good.*

I Peter 2:2-3

Have you wonder what those percentage labels are in our milk? The differences in those labels are due to different amounts of fat in the milk. Whole milk is milk that has nothing removed. All milk has protein and carbohydrate, and in whole milk about 4 % of its total content is composed of fat. 2% milk has two percent fat; that means it has about half the fat of whole milk. Similarly, 1% milk has half as much fat as the 2% and skim milk has all of the fat removed. There are a lot of things to know about milk especially in relation to feeding newborn infants.

Peter picks up this metaphor to illustrate our relationship with Christ – he calls us to long for pure and spiritual milk for growth – growth in our salvation. This brings into focus the kind of milk that we drink for us to grow in spirit. Study shows that newborn infants need the calories and fat from whole milk. Although Peter may not have knowledge of the complexity of the world of milk as we know it today but he knew that best quality of milk – pure not diluted nor adulterated is necessary for growth.

What kind of milk are we drinking, how often do we drink milk, where do we get nutrition from so that we will grow in our relationship with the Lord. This metaphor of milk and growth brings forth a lot of questions. Will occasional reading of the Bible, sporadic prayer and reflection, seasonal worship life make us grow? Peter issued the challenge for those who tasted the pure and the best milk - *if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good*, I can hear him pleading - seek the Lord, long to grow in your salvation.

Prayer:

*O Lord, our God
we desire to grow in our salvation
stir that longing in us
for that spiritual milk that we need. Amen*