

Sermon for Easter 7 – John 15:26-16:4

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“... You also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.” Who has been with our Lord from the beginning? In today’s Gospel, Jesus is addressing His disciples. Shortly after His Baptism in the Jordan River by John, our Lord called Peter, James, John, and Andrew, all of whom were common fishermen, to be His disciples. “Follow me,” Christ said to Philip and Nathaniel not long after that. Matthew was called from the tax collector’s booth to be a disciple. The rest of the 12 were also called by the Lord from the beginning. They saw Jesus preach to multitudes and feed thousands. They saw Him heal the sick and cast out demons. They saw Him calm storms and even raise the dead. They would bear witness to Christ’s death and resurrection when He appeared to them in His resurrected body. The Lord commands His disciples to testify to this truth. After all, they have been with Him from the beginning.

However, before the disciples, there was someone else who was with Jesus “from the beginning.” Jesus’ mother knew Him long before He called the disciples. Mary had known our flesh and blood Lord since the moment He was conceived in her womb by the Holy Spirit. The unmarried virgin carried Him those 9 months, even as nosy Nazarites spread rumors about her swelling abdomen. Let this be a reminder to us that bearing the Word always has its consequences! Mary, pregnant with Divinity, traveled across the Judean terrain with her betrothed Joseph to Jerusalem. She gave birth to the Son of David in the City of David, in an enclosure meant for housing animals. After some time, they fled to Egypt and back to Nazareth. There, Mary watched as the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon Him. Her worry turned to wonder as her Boy taught Israel’s teachers in the temple. “...Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” and Mary was there every step of the way. To say Mary was with Him from the beginning would be almost an understatement. And this affords us the opportunity to give no small amount of praise to those women, who with Mary-like temperance, have loved us every step of the way: Happy Mother’s Day!

“...You have been with me from the beginning.” The Lord gave His disciples the responsibility to witness to the world about Himself. For the eleven apostles + Matthias, who Luke tells us was also with Christ from the beginning, for these 12 this meant preaching the Gospel to all creation and baptizing all nations in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They were to teach all people. What were they to teach? The mercies of the Lord. Above all, they were to be witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection, which is the foundation of faith, forgiveness, and eternal life, because they had been with Christ from the beginning.

You have also been with Christ from the beginning, or more accurately, He has been with you from the beginning. For some of us, it was time that we can remember –

when water and God's Word were placed upon us in Holy Baptism. For most of us it was during a time we couldn't remember, receiving the same gift of water and God's Word as we were welcomed into God's family in Holy Baptism.

Yes, Christ has been with us from the beginning. He's been with us every step of the way as His Baptized children, though we haven't always acted like His baptized children. Instead of loving others earnestly and covering the multitude of their sins, haven't we exposed their many sins, slandering their reputation, so we can look better? We've shown hospitality and helped our neighbor. Good for us! But have we done so without grumbling? God doesn't care much for our outward works if our heart is far from Him, begrudging the responsibilities He has given us, even though we do them. "My own good works all came to naught,/ No grace or merit gaining;/ Free will against God's judgment fought,/ Dead to all good remaining." Have we truly lived as disciples of our Lord and worthy ambassadors of this high calling in Baptism? Has God not seen all, even the sins we try so hard to hide?

Of course He does! Yet He also does something about it! As the Lord's Baptized saints, He began a good work in us and stays with us until He brings that work to completion in the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ. When our Savior ascended into heaven, He did not leave His disciples alone. Even though the Master would not be among them to preach the Gospel and counsel them as He did before, God Himself would fulfill this task. He would continue to open the way of the Word for them and for us by convicting us of sin and blessing us with His righteousness. He preserves the purity of His message. He leads us into all truth.

"Now to My Father I depart,/ From earth to heav'n ascending,/ And, heav'nly wisdom to impart,/ The Holy Spirit sending;/ In trouble He will comfort you/ And teach you always to be true/ and into truth shall guide you."

From the Father and Son proceeds the Holy Spirit. Without the third article of the creed ("I believe in the Holy Spirit"), our faith is not the true Christian faith. Christianity is not simply knowing stuff about Jesus and following Him. It is something that can be found only where God's Word is at work in the presence and person of the Holy Spirit. What does this mean? I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." He began the work, He continues the work, and He completes the work.

So, "as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace ... whoever serves, [do so] as one who serves by the strength that God supplies – in order that in everything God may be glorified through Christ Jesus." Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠