

Sunday21-B7 Homily by Fr. Gabor

Peter says to Jesus in today's Gospel reading: 'Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life.' We heard something similar from Jesus two weeks ago when he said in John's Gospel (6:63) that His words are spirit and they are life. I wonder why is it then that most of us don't realise how much life the words of Jesus give us. The short answer would be that this is because of the lack of faith or interest in the Word of God, or we got used to it so much that we don't even notice the life that comes from His words.

But why does Peter say to the Lord: 'you have the message of eternal life', not just any life, but eternal life. Probably because Peter and the other disciples witnessed a lot of the miracles of Jesus and heard Him, the Word of God, teaching them directly. They also spent a lot of time with Jesus. So they dedicated themselves to spend time with Him and thus had many opportunities to experience a taste of eternal life, and probably this is what prompted him to say this. However, he would never have said this unless they believed in Jesus' words and miracles. Faith is the most important precondition to having a taste of eternal life, but then putting faith into practice is also essential for living the new life that Jesus gives us, because faith without actions is dead, as St. James says (2:14-26).

As I prepared for my homily I also discovered an important saying of St. Paul, in which he describes so beautifully the life of the believer: 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal 2:20, NIV, also cf. Col 3:4). So when you live the life that Jesus gives, you already live His eternal life, and it becomes visible through your daily life, because your lifestyle becomes the lifestyle of Christ, which is mainly the same kind of life as what we will live in eternity; ie. praise, worship and glorification of the Father's love and mercy, gathered together in unity with Him and one another, in joy and peace. These are the characteristics of eternal life and of the life of Jesus? However, here I need to mention that gathering others, or at least guiding others towards God the Father, basically evangelisation, is the invitation to eternal life, which is the duty of all who already enjoy a taste of it.

I want to give you some examples of my experience and taste of the eternal life that Jesus gives me through His words. First of all Mass is such an experience to me, because here we praise and worship the Holy Trinity through hymns and songs, and prayers, and we do this as His family gathered together in unity with God and one another. We also listen to the life-giving words of God and open our hearts to it to fill us with His life. Here we are united with Him and one another through the Eucharist, and through the Spirit, just like in Heaven in eternal life.

To me personally the word of God comes alive when I read it in the context of prayer as I pray the Liturgy of the Hours, in particular the Evening prayer, in

which there is always a short passage from the Bible. I don't just read that passage and immediately continue with the next prayer, but I stop and reflect on it and ask Jesus to speak to me. Often I hear Him speaking, especially in connection with my own issues or my own attitudes. Jesus often says something about them, and so His words come alive to me in the form of encouragement or warning, etc.

Reading short bits from the Bible every day on a regular basis both as an individual and as a family is strongly recommended. Parents, make it your priority, if you want to experience something of that eternal life which the word of God gives you. Remember you also have to introduce your child to it. So gently help your children get used to reading the Bible. Buying a children's Bible, and reading it together is a really good opportunity to have a taste of eternal life, and do that in the context of a dedicated period of family prayer time. This is your opportunity to explain to your kids at their level what God tells them through the Bible, and so you teach them how to hear and understand God's words. If you do this regularly with your kids they will see that you like the Bible and they will also like it and enjoy reading it, because it will be for them a quality time with their dads and mums, and later on in their lives they will associate Bible reading with an encounter with their heavenly Father and Mother Mary. This could become very helpful for them especially later on when they go through challenging times as adults and look for God's wisdom and life.

Watching Bible stories on YouTube together with your children is also a good idea. I have seen how well this can work when I visited families, and how such times with your kids help your bonding with them. There are for example the stories of David and his friends, and while watching these stories your kids will inevitably ask questions, and that will be a good opportunity to explain the message of God to them.

You also experience how life-giving the word of God is when you do confession, especially when you say your words of sorrow, and then hear the forgiving words of God the Father through the words of absolution, and then you experience the peace or inner relief that follows the absolution.

Finally I also experience how life-giving God's words are when I feel down. When I listen to the word of God at these times and concentrate on it somehow the words sound very personal, and they sound as if God was speaking to me directly, and particular with regards to the issues that I struggle with. In these occasions His words are really life-giving and encouraging and give me the strength to do His will, rather than my will.

So always and regularly read the Bible, even if just a short passage, because these words are spirit and they are eternal life.