

Gospel: John 16:12-15

Jesus said to his disciples:

"I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now.

But when he comes, the Spirit of truth,

he will guide you to all truth.

He will not speak on his own,

but he will speak what he hears,

and will declare to you the things that are coming.

He will glorify me,

because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you.

Everything that the Father has is mine;

for this reason I told you that he will take from what is mine

and declare it to you."

Homily Transcript – *Transformed from the Inside Out*

Today's Gospel from John 16 is part of the Last Supper discourse; a collection of sayings in John's Gospel that he places on Jesus's lips as his final words to his disciples. In kind of a catchall phrase Jesus says, "I have a lot more to tell you but you can't bear it now, but when he comes—the Holy Spirit—he will enlighten you. He's a spirit of truth." That is to say, we only have a limited capacity on our own to be able to receive all the truth that God wants us to have, but when the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts and comes into our minds, He gives us a greater capacity to be able to understand God's ways and God's desire in our life.

Today's first reading is, I think, a good example of Paul tailoring his preaching to the capacity of his audience to be able to receive it. They haven't received the Holy Spirit yet and so Paul tailors his words in a very clever way. He's in Athens and he's at the center of the elite of Athenian society, the Areopagus. It's a collection of philosophers and theologians. Scholars estimate that there were probably about 30 people that Paul would have been addressing at the time. If you have the opportunity to go over to Athens at some point, they know where this little hill is. There's a plateau there on the outskirts of the contemporary city of Athens and that's where this particular address from the Acts of the Apostles takes place.

It's an example of brilliant rhetoric on St. Paul's part. He walks around the city and he notices the shrine to an unseen God he says, "Athenians! The God that you didn't understand, that you are worshiping and you named him simply as an unknown God, I'm here to declare to you who he is." He even quotes one of the pagan philosophers, "In him we live and move and have our being." That phrase has been incorporated into some of our own prayers within our Catholic liturgy.

Then at the end of the homily, St. Paul points to the resurrection. There's three different reactions on the part of those who heard him. Some scoff at him and mock him, "The resurrection? How can that be true?" They simply dismiss him as a fool. Others say, 'You know, what you're talking about Paul is really interesting [yawn] we have to get back to you on that sometime.' They were a society that loved to talk and debate and engage in intellectual ideas, but their debate and their

talk doesn't go anywhere. That seems to be the majority of the people, because right after this the Acts of the Apostles says that St. Paul moves on to Corinth. You will notice that there is no letter to the Athenians, as there are two letters to the Corinthians. St. Paul never wrote a letter to the Athenians; or at least one that is extant.

Presumably the few people that are mentioned at the end of the reading—one of them Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus—so at least he had one convert somebody who listened to what he said. There's a woman that we don't know anything about. It would be unusual for a woman to be a member of that elite society so presumably she was of another class who heard the Gospel and a few others who are unnamed. For the most part, Paul's words fell on deaf ears. It's not enough to simply hear the word, we have to take it into our hearts. We have to allow the word of God to transform us from the inside out. It's not enough for us to simply come here day after day, week after week, if the words of the Gospel simply fly in one ear and out the other. If our lives are not being transformed as a result of our prayer, we're missing the mark. We're no better than the Athenians that are written about. We have to pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit into our lives. It is that spirit that transforms us.

Thomas Merton has written a prayer that is quite popular; perhaps you've heard it. It's about this holy search for God that St. Paul talks about in his address to the Athenians, that there is deep inside the human heart a longing for transcendence; for something more. As we look around at our world today, we sense it's not as God wants it to be. If we dig deep into our own hearts, we recognize there's a longing that we can't satisfy by ourselves; that longing will bring us in touch with God.

Merton writes famously:

"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end, nor do I really know myself. And the fact that I think that I am following your will, does not mean that I am actually doing so, but I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you, and I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire and I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, I will trust you always. Though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death, I will not fear for you are ever with me and you will never leave me to face my perils alone."

Fan the flame of that desire within our hearts; that longing for God for ourselves and for our loved ones; for your children for your grandchildren; for your spouses; for your neighbors; nieces and nephews and cousins. Fan that flame of desire because it's that desire that will lead us to God. It's that asking for the Holy Spirit to come into our lives; to come into our families; to come into our parishes; to come into our cities; to come into our nation—that asking, that longing, that desiring. That is a holy prayer that God will never refuse.

Jesus says, "I have much more to tell you, but you can't bear it now, but ask for the Holy Spirit and that Holy Spirit will lead you and guide you to all truth." Amen? Amen.