

7TH SUN OF EASTER C CYCLE, ST MARK LUTHERAN CHURCH MAY 8TH, 2016

1st Reading: Acts 7:55-60 [Lord Jesus, receive my spirit ... do not hold this sin against them]

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 97 "The Lord is King, the most high over all the earth."

2nd Reading: Revelation 22:12-20 [I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end]

Gospel: John 17:20-26 [Jesus prays for us that the love of the Father may be in his disciples, and that he may live in and through us]

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to John.

Lifting his eyes to heaven, Jesus prayed, saying:

"Holy Father, I do not pray for my disciples alone.

I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word,

that they may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you,

that they may be [one] in us,

so that the world may believe you sent me.

I have given them the glory you gave me,

so that they may be one, as we are one, I living in them and you living in me, that their unity may

be complete. So shall the world know that you sent me,

and that you loved them even as you loved me.

Father, they are your gift to me.

I wish that where I am they also may be with me,

that they may see my glory that you gave me,

because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

Just Father, the world does not know you, but I know you;

and they know that you sent me.

I made your name known to them and I will continue to make it known,

so that your love for me may live in them and I may live in them.

The Gospel of the Lord (John 17:20-26)

♪ **Come Lord Jesus, Come Lord Jesus, Come Lord Jesus, Come Lord Jesus** ♪

Peter: We just sang the last words of the second reading from Revelation,

the next to last verse of the New Testament "Come, Lord Jesus."

The words are the way the early Christians understood & prayed an Aramaic phrase,

Marana-tha, literally, "Our Lord, come!"

The only other time these words are used in the NT is at the end of the 1st letter to the Corinthians, where Paul prays them as his concluding prayer for the Corinthians

"I Paul write this greeting in my own hand... **Marana-tha!** [Our Lord, come!]

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus." [1 Cor, 16:22]

In early Christian liturgy this was an Aramaic expression used as a hope-filled, enthusiastic, heartfelt prayer of the community gathered in the name of the Lord.

In the Greek text of St. Paul, the words are not even translated from the Aramaic, and in some English translations - like the King James Version, the New American Bible & the Jerusalem Bible - they simply appear as "Maran atha." And, like so many parts of the Scripture, they can be read in more than one way.

The same words, spelled the same way, can mean both "Our Lord, come" & "Our Lord has come!" depending on how you divide them.

Marana-tha =s "O Lord, come" & Maran-atha =s "Our Lord, has come"

Anna: Which one is the right meaning? ~ Which is it, "Our Lord has come" or "Our Lord, come!"
My answer is YES! Both are right.

Our Lord HAS come, his name is Jesus the Christ. He says today in the second reading,
"I am the Alpha & the Omega, the first & the last, the beginning & the end."

In the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Stephen witnesses to his faith that Jesus has come, and so he cries out as he is dying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Stephen was the first martyr - the Greek word means, "**witness**."

I truly believe that in our own lives, one of the most powerful witnesses to love and commitment is a mother who lives her calling to nurture and teach her children how to be "**witnesses**".

My own mother did much better than she should have been able to with what she did and did not receive from her family - which was quite flawed.

One of the gifts among the many she gave to me was to encourage me to risk moving to upstate NY from NJ to follow where God was calling me. She didn't quite understand what that was about and that I would be 3 hours farther away from her while she was coming closer to the end of her life.

Whatever our gifts and our wounds, we can be **witnesses** to the love and truth of Jesus, and can expect that he will influence and transform our lives more deeply.

We can be **witnesses** like Stephen and the mother of Jesus if we follow the One who inspired and blessed them.

Peter The question all the Scriptures ask today is: Who is this Lord for me?.....for you?
Is Christ Lord of your whole life? How far **am I** willing to go in following Jesus as my Lord?

We tend to divide our lives into pieces: personal, spiritual, financial, sexual, political, life at school, on the job. But if we really listen to Christ, he calls us to accept him as Lord of our whole life, in all its parts.

And I'm not completely there yet, are you?

I am tempted to keep control of parts of my life, of myself.

That's why we need to live the faith we profess when we say the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' creed. Whenever we pray the Lord's Prayer and say the words, "Thy Kingdom come," we are saying "Marana- tha, - O Lord, come".

Whenever we pray the creed on Sunday, we are saying Maran- atha "our Lord has come."
But we need to make it personal. I need to ask Jesus to be Lord of my whole life.

How can we do that today, here and now.

How can we live that way for the rest of the week, and the rest of our lives?

First of all, to really accept Jesus as my Lord, I have to reject other lords.
I have to recognize and reject the false gods of our time.

The Book of Revelation names some of the false gods of the 1st century after the death & resurrection of Christ, & today's reading puts some of the followers of those idols as those who are **outside** of the city gates: "dogs, sorcerers, fornicators, murderers, idolaters & everyone who loves & practices falsehood."

Some of those idols may be understandable to us today, but some may not.

And they can be too easily used to condemn people we know.

Maybe that's why that verse is omitted in the Catholic Lectionary.

Our task is not to figure out what each category means, but hear the deeper message: there are false gods in every age, we are called to identify the false gods of our own time - and reject them so we can better follow the true Lord of all, Jesus the Christ.

Anna: The Book of Revelation is often quoted by people who want to condemn others or predict the end of the world [and they have to revise their predictions every time the date passes, as it has for centuries] & some of its bizarre & flamboyant symbols have been applied literally to events & people down through the ages.

But to understand that book, we need to study it and see that it is really a patchwork of references and allusions to the Old Testament. Some scholars have said it really belongs between the Old Testament and the Gospels and comes from the community that followed John the Baptist.

To understand what it is saying, we need to know that it is written in code for a people who are in crisis and suffer under the oppression of Rome. Many of the symbols could be understood only by the church of the first century. In a way, it was encrypted & we don't know the passwords any more. It was written this way so the oppressors would not understand that they were being mocked.

If we understand that it is not a literal prediction of the last days but rather a poetic reflection on how to deal with crisis & hardship in every age, the message & the meaning can be a blessing to us in the 21st century.

Peter Instead of taking the labels of the 1st century and trying to put them on people in my world, I need to ask myself, am I worshipping any of the idols of my own time? We would like to name 3 of them.

Here is the first Idol [A TV remote CONTROL] - This is an image or icon of what is underneath all of our contemporary false gods! That ground is CONTROL!

I believe that abuse, oppression, greed, rape, racism, murder and other forms of violence are rooted in an addiction to control, or a fear of not being in control. Control is so powerful and idol that it is disguised as good in many parts of our American society. There was a movie named Wall Street - where the main character says - in word & action - Greed is Good! Our consumer society is often run on this principle.

Anna: The second idol worshipped by many in our world is named Fear. It is so easy to let fear guide our choices and wall us off from each other. When we worship fear, someone whose skin color or ethnic origin is different than ours can be seen as a threat before we know who they are, someone who speaks a language we don't know or has an accent different from ours can be judged as inferior to us.

When we worship fear, it becomes possible execute someone we are afraid will kill again, even without proof of their guilt.

When we worship fear, we can do anything to prevent painful inconveniences to ourselves or others, to individuals or to the whole community.

When we worship fear, anyone who is "OTHER" or "different from" us in any way is easy to label as monsters & difficult to see as brothers & sisters, sons & daughters. Immigrants & those who hold religious beliefs different from ours too easily become demons who exist to kill us.

Peter The third idol is called **certainty**. We would like to have a book of answers for every question we face, or an authority figure who will tell us what to do in every situation, but all Jesus tells us is *"love one another as I have loved you!"* and sends the Holy Spirit to help us discern what that means in our day to day life.

When we worship certainty, we can avoid the pain and discomfort of holding up the mirror of the Gospel and the life of our Lord to *all* the ways we think and act *every* time we are faced with a decision. We can give up our freedom to a political system, or a charismatic leader, or a set of cultural biases.

The phrase "What Would Jesus Do?" can be a real guide when we are called on to use our Gospel freedom. But an even better question to ask oneself is, "What does Jesus want **me** to do in this situation?"

do when faced with a health care system that oppresses the poor or makes it difficult for me to care for my family?

What would Jesus want me to believe when I read books or hear preachers that portray God as violent & rigid, & leave out some of the primary teachings of the New Testament, like "Love your enemies" & "Forgive as you have been forgiven?"

How would Jesus want me to treat people and families who leave their native countries to find a better life or to escape war & oppression?

What would he want me to say about a prison system that sets up obstacles to rehabilitation rather than assisting those who have served their terms to find housing & employment.

Anna: How can we pray "Come Lord Jesus" in a world that so easily worships **control**, **greed**, **violence**, **fear** and **certainty**?

First of all, I need to let go of **control**, and let Jesus be my Lord. I need to remember, as someone once told us when we used this image, that the only real control is truly REMOTE - it belongs to God, through Christ in the Spirit.

Second, I need to **act like Jesus** in my big & little choices about everything. Stephen uses almost the same words Jesus spoke from the cross, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." "Do not hold this sin against them." He shows us how far we *can* go when we open ourselves to the Spirit, but he also shows us who walks with us and who will receive us into his loving arms when we let ourselves pray from the depths of our hearts COME, LORD JESUS!

Finally, I need to receive **my true identity** from God. When I really accept Jesus as my Lord, I see who I really am: A son or daughter of the Father, a sister or brother to Jesus himself, and a home for the Holy Spirit, as Stephen was and is, as Mary the mother of Jesus was and is, as Francis and Clare were and are.

Jesus prays for **us** in the passage from the Gospel of John which we heard today. He reminds us that God loves us and that the love of God has the power to *change* us into the image of Christ. He prays that the love with which the Father loves him will be in us, & that he will live in and through us.

Do you believe that the prayer of Jesus is being answered? It will be answered in us to the extent that we live another verse of the song we began with. *Jesus is Lord!* I invite you to sing with us now & I pray that we can commit ourselves to live it today & for the rest of our lives.

♪ **Jesus is Lord** ♪

