

KERYGMA

I have a good friend named Father Tom, a Redemptorist, who is from Kansas City. We met in the seminary more than forty years ago. He gave us a three-day retreat two years ago and he made a great impression on the parishioners who heard him. He is coming here next week for several weeks to visit me. I suspect he may be more interested in visiting the Bethpage golf course more than me. But he will celebrate some Masses while he is here and I hope you get to hear him preach.

I was ordained two years earlier than Tom and spent my first years of the priesthood teaching High School English and doing a fair amount of preaching retreats and missions. Tom, after a stint as a parish priest, became a full-time preacher of parish missions for many years. He invited me to join him for a parish mission in St. Louis where the pastor was another Redemptorist friend with whom we both had been with in the seminary.

I arrived for the mission feeling confident. I had good experience in preaching and did my best to prepare good talks. Well, on the first night of our parish mission, the church was packed to overflowing, and Tom got up and preached for more than an hour without a note. He had the people laughing uproariously and then moved them to tears several times during the talk. He was one of the most dynamic preachers that I had ever heard. Every eye in the church was on him, eager to listen to his message. I sat in the pew thinking to myself, *Oh my Lord. I have to follow him tomorrow!* My confidence was diminishing as my anxiety was rising. What had I gotten myself into? After the service was concluded, there was a social afterwards with coffee and cookies, and a woman came up to me, and said, *we can't wait to hear from you. You must be really something if they brought you all the way from New York.* I immediately devoured a dozen chocolate chip cookies.

At one point during his talk, Father Tom talked about *kerygma*. *Kerygma* is Greek word that means *preaching of the Gospel*. But like many words, it has a deeper level. *Kerygma* is proclaiming the essential message of the Gospel in a very direct and basic way. It is simple and to the point. Its focus is very much on Jesus: who He is, what He preached and what happened to him in his death and resurrection. The basic curricula of the *kerygma* are very clear: *Jesus is the chosen Messiah of God, the one who was promised. And though he was crucified, He rose gloriously from the dead, appearing to his disciples, and having been exulted at the right hand of the Father through his*

Ascension, now summons all to him, through the ministry of the Church. This proclamation requires a response from us, that we should repent of our sins accept baptism and live in the new life which Christ is offering. In Church, we hear a great deal of teaching about Jesus. That is important. We learn about the commandments, the parables, the beatitudes, the sacraments, and the great gift of the Holy Eucharist. These gifts from Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit are the path to Christ. But, even more basic than these teaching is the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. *Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.* This is the message that transform the believer to be a follower of Jesus. The night I heard Tom preach about kerygma he used the term *Kerygma Baby* as he did a little dance. He was *twerking* before it had been invented. *Kerygma Baby.* You never forget some images.

The preaching of the early church was very kerygmatic. Listen to the words of St. Peter in the Acts of the Apostles: *Let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, "What are we to do, my brothers? Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* The core message of our faith: God has made both the Lord and Christ you crucified. Repent, be baptized, receive the Holy Spirit.

In our second reading, we hear more of preaching of Peter in his First Letter: *He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds, you have been healed.* Amazing Grace: Christ has taken your sins and mine in his body nailed to the cross. *By his wounds, we are healed.* All our sins, our failures, our guilts and shames are carried by Jesus born in his crucified body. We are set free from them. That's Kerygma Baby!

One of the earliest images that captured the first Christians was Jesus the Good Shepherd. Some of the earliest paintings in the catacombs were of the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. The Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to in search of the one lost. Here at our parish we have two vivid images of *Kerygma*. The first is the stained-glass window on to the right of the pulpit. Jesus is rising from the dead, overcoming death through the power of the Holy Spirit. He has broken the power of death. Above our altar is the beautifully carved image of the risen Jesus. He is not seen as a dying beater man on a cross but as a vibrant vigorous in whom we see the glory of God.

I still struggle with beginning the Creed with the word that were changed in the new translation of our Mass prayers. I liked the words *we believe* with the focus on the *we* as a we are proclaiming our faith and drawing strength from one another as a community. Yet, the change to *I* rather than *we* makes very evident that I am proclaiming my faith in the *Kerygma* of the Gospel. When we say the Creed, we are proclaiming kerygma: the words of everlasting life.

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

*I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.*

*I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.*