

4th Sunday of Easter B
The Power of Salvation

Someone sent me a You Tube video a few months ago that featured a young Catholic priest asking “Alexa” (who is the artificial intelligence version an encyclopedia) several questions. He asks, “Alexa, who founded the Lutheran Church?” She replies, “Martin Luther.” Next he asks, “Alexa, who founded the Mormon Church?” She replies, “Joseph Smith.” He then asks, “Alexa, who founded the Methodist Church?” She replies, “John Wesley.” The priest then looks straight at you with a grin on his face and asks a fourth question. “Alexa, who founded the Roman Catholic Church.” She replies, “Jesus Christ.”

The Second Vatican Council back in the 1960s made this point in one of its documents stating that the Church of Christ “subsists in the Catholic Church.” This doesn’t mean that Catholics are necessarily better than non-Catholics but it does mean that the Catholic Church is unique in that its foundation is built upon the apostles with the successor of Peter as its leader. Its members encounter Christ through the Word of God, the scriptures, as well as through the sacraments and the mass that Jesus first celebrated at the Last Supper.

The Council goes on to teach that “many elements of sanctification and of truth can be found outside” the Catholic Church, that is, God can and does work through other Christian denominations, non-Christian religions, and even atheists. After all, God is love and wherever there is love there is God. God’s love is best found in the gift of his son, Jesus Christ.

This is why St. Peter can say in the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles that there is no salvation through anyone else but Jesus. As Jesus himself tells us in one of the gospels, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” Peter makes it clear that he was able to heal a crippled man because Jesus is living and acting in and through him. The physical healing of the crippled

man is a sign of God's love. As God worked through Peter, God can also work through us, as well as through all people of good will.

This universal vision of salvation is confirmed in the gospel reading where Jesus identifies himself as "the good shepherd" who knows his sheep and will lay down his life for them. However, he also tells us that he has other sheep that do not belong to this fold; that he must lead them also so that there will be one flock, one shepherd. The one who saves is a lowly shepherd. He has come to save all.

St. John in the second reading reveals what salvation is all about. It is about being "like" God, it is seeing God "as he is." St. John argues that we begin to see God now in the love that he has bestowed on us. In other words, salvation is not just in the "next world" but in this world right now to the extent that we both give and receive love. The love that we are talking about here is the love that the good shepherd has for his sheep. A love that reaches out to care for others even to the point of laying down one's life for them.

Like Alexa, I too believe that the Roman Catholic Church is founded by Jesus Christ. Like the Second Vatican Council, I too believe that one doesn't have to be a Catholic in order to be saved. I stay a Catholic, however, because I believe that it is the best road for me to salvation. It enables me to "see" God now in the scriptures, in the sacraments, in the mass, and wherever the commandment of love is lived out. What is the best road to salvation for you?