

Rev. Derek Fairman

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time B

This week has been designated Catholic Schools week. This takes place every year around the time in the Church calendar of the memorial of St. Thomas Aquinas on January 28th. It is important for us to remember how important education is, not just in general but also the importance of learning about our Catholic faith and to educate ourselves in the Catholic faith, so that we can better live the faith.

Something that we should keep in mind is that the Lord Jesus spent much time teaching. The Gospel reading for this Sunday recounts the time when the Lord Jesus entered the synagogue and taught. Now, the Gospel does not record what He taught, but since He was in the synagogue, we can easily imagine that He was commenting on the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and this was not out of the ordinary for Him.

The Gospel reading also recounts that the people in the synagogue were astonished at His teaching, because He taught them with authority. The teaching of the scribes was different, because the scribes could only make a guess at what God meant in the Scriptures. They made good, educated guesses, but they were only guesses. The Lord Jesus knew what the Scriptures meant, because He is the source of the Scriptures. He knew what they meant and why they were written: He knew that they were written about Him.

It should not surprise us that the Lord spent so much time teaching people. Doctrine has always been an important part of the Catholic faith. Today in our society doctrine can be considered bad or at least a difficult subject. There are some people who think that doctrine is something that divides Christians, and so it must be bad if it causes division. There are some who just believe in the Bible but don't get into doctrine, thinking that somehow trying to formulate doctrine is an adulteration of the Bible. The Bible is all that is needed.

Well, the Scriptures are foundational for what we believe. However, we also acknowledge Tradition, and we realize that both Scriptures and Tradition are the two ways that God reveals Himself to His people. In fact, we are now beginning to have a better understanding of how the Tradition shaped the Scripture, and how Scripture has shaped and continues to shape the Tradition. The two are distinct but frequently interact with each other. An integral part of the Tradition that we have received is the Church's doctrine.

Doctrine does not cause division. People who think that they know better than everyone else causes division. The intellectual pride which leads to heresy causes division. Heresy is more than just having a "different opinion:" at the heart of heresy is the stubborn obstinance of pride.

Rather than being something bad or the cause of the Church's problems, doctrine is a way in which God brings grace and light to us. The life of the mind is just as important as the life of the heart. St. Paul teaches us to put on the mind of Christ. Now, that means a lot of things: it means that we must think as the Lord Jesus would think. That includes seeing others as the Lord Jesus sees them, with compassion and kindness.

Putting on the mind of Christ also includes knowing doctrine. If we do not study doctrine, if we do not know what our faith teaches us, if we do not open our minds to the Church's teaching, then how can we put on the mind of Christ? If the Lord Jesus spent so much of His ministry teaching people, don't you think that His doctrines were on His mind?

If we do not put on the mind of Christ, then something else will fill our minds. After all, our minds have a desire to know and to learn. So, our minds do not like having a vacuum. If Christ's teachings are not there in our minds, then something else will enter into our minds to fill the void. If we do not listen to the Lord's teachings, we will pick up on other teachings and we will put on the mind of whatever is happening in this world. This can happen even without us consciously knowing about it.

As children, we learn about the Catholic faith through catechism classes and religious education. However, learning about the Catholic faith is something that does not end with Confirmation or the end of our high school years. Learning about the Catholic faith is a lifelong process and there is always more to know. Even clergy must do their best to engage in ongoing formation. These are ways that we continue to put on the mind of Christ.

We do have a parish library to assist in this. Now, sometimes people say that religious books are not for them, for a variety of reasons. However, there are many different kinds of books and other materials that will appeal to us. Sometimes we just start off with the lives of the saints. Sometimes we can start with Church history.

As we approach the altar, we thank the Lord for giving us our Catholic faith, with so much to learn and to explore. We ask the Lord to help us to listen to His teachings with open minds and hearts. We ask the Lord to help us to put on the mind of Christ, so that we may grow in wisdom every day.