Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

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April 20, 2023
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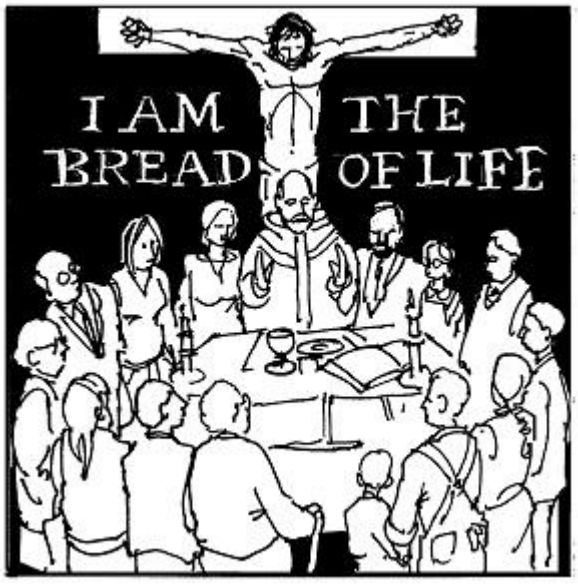

“If this endeavor is from God, you will not be able to destroy it” (Acts 5:39).

Acts 5:34-42; Jn 6:1-15

In today’s first readings from Acts, Gamaliel, a respected scholar of the Law, tells his companions in the Sanhedrin that the Jesus movement will fail if it is only of human

origin. But, if it is from God, nothing can stop it. And, in fact, to try to stop it puts us on the wrong side of history and on the wrong side of God.

The “Gamaliel Rule” could be applied to many political and religious movements in history. One argument for the authenticity of the Christian church is that it has survived for over 2,000 years. In history's many pendulum swings between stabilization and innovation, the Holy Spirit has always guaranteed the survival of the church by regularly reforming the church to keep it relevant to its mission.

Some would say that one of the most important reform movements was the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), when over 2,500 bishops met with the pope to adapt the essential identity of the church to the pastoral needs of Catholics and to the changing reality of the modern world.

Since his election in 2013, Pope Francis has clearly supported this ongoing reform as the will of the Holy Spirit, despite efforts by some to restore a more hierarchical, juridical and doctrinal model of the church that came from the 16th century Council of Trent .

Today’s Gospel account of the feeding of a huge crowd in the wilderness shows us how Jesus could be concerned with people’s physical needs while at the same time not being a political leader. When the crowds rush to make him king after the miraculous feeding, he escapes into the mountains to pray. He is about more than physical hunger and political liberation. The bread he gave them was both real bread and also food for every kind of human and spiritual hunger. He himself was the Bread of Life, manna from heaven for God's people.

The connection between the Resurrection and the Eucharist is evident here. We share in the risen body of Christ by participating in the Mass and receiving Communion. If we want our faith in Easter to take hold and deepen, we must nourish it sacramentally. Each time we receive the Eucharist we are intimately encountering the Risen Lord and becoming “another Christ” in the world.

Inviting people to life in Christ is the church’s essential mission. Easter faith builds our confidence that even death cannot stop the Holy Spirit from working in and through us. We are living proof of the Gamaliel Rule. God is with us, and if we are faithful to the mission, we will succeed, no matter what.

In this Easter season we are reminded that the Eucharist is the food for resurrection. St. Thomas Aquinas called it the “pledge of future glory.” When we receive Jesus in Communion, we are receiving the Risen Christ. The promise made to us at baptism is a lifelong development that requires nourishment. The Eucharist brings our baptismal identity to full maturity.

So even now, as we enter another ordinary day, meeting our responsibilities and encountering all its ordinary limits and even frustrations, the life of glory we already share in Christ is growing within us. Each of us is destined for life with God for all eternity. That life is hidden now, but if we live in imitation of Jesus, we become more and more like him. Our hidden life is the same life the Risen Christ revealed as our future.