

Easter 6 5/17/20
Acts 17:16-31 A

SOME OF THE EPICUREAN AND STOIC PHILOSOPHERS ALSO CONVERSED WITH HIM. AND SOME SAID, "WHAT DOES THIS BABBLER WISH TO SAY?" OTHERS SAID, "HE SEEMS TO BE A PREACHER OF FOREIGN DIVINITIES" – BECAUSE HE WAS PREACHING JESUS AND THE RESURRECTION.

30,000. That's the estimate of how many idols there were that were worshipped in the city of Athens. In fact, the running joke of the day was that there were more gods than men in Athens. So, as the Apostle Paul reasons in the synagogue and marketplace, some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were not real impressed with his babbling.

The Epicureans believed that gods existed, but they do not get involved with human beings at all. They also believed there was no such thing as an afterlife; when you died, you were dead. End of story. And of course, if there is no afterlife, life today as we know is all there is, so Epicurean philosophy taught hedonism, which is a fancy way of saying, "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die". The Stoics were not quite the exact opposite, but pretty close. They taught that true happiness meant reigning in all your passions, so that you are in true control; virtually to the point it was even wrong to feel emotions.

The Epicurean and Stoic philosophers epitomized the city of Athens. The Athenians thought quite highly of themselves. They gloried in their ideas; they thought of themselves and saw themselves as enlightened intellectuals; they saw themselves as the great center of philosophy and learning and the arts. They considered themselves a cut above the average bear when it came to being smart.

Even when it came to which gods to fear, love, and trust in above all things. So, when Paul comes with his babbling about Jesus and the resurrection, the Athenians take him to the Areopagus. From there, the Parthenon could easily be seen. The Parthenon was the temple dedicated to the worship of the goddess Athena, the patron goddess of their city Athens. And, that was not the only temple to a god in their fair city. After all, they were smart, they could think for themselves, who was to say any god or goddess was any better than another; so, they just said all gods are the same, all can be equally worshipped, and all told, there were over 30,000 idols worshipped in the city of Athens.

Where the Athenians saw wisdom and enlightenment, Paul saw idolatry. So, when Paul came to Athens, he did what it was he did – He came preaching Jesus and the resurrection, and the Athenians, the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers heard that and called him a “babbling,” a teacher of foreign divinities, which is a nice way of saying, they had no use for his foolish and empty words.

Really, honestly, isn't that what you feel about Paul, as well? That he's a babbling, and a proclaimer of foreign divinities.

You are very much like the Athenians. No, you don't live in Athens, but you have your gods. And, there are days, there are times, you have no use for Jesus and His resurrection. You think of yourself as a cut above; you value your opinions, your imagination; you can think for yourself. There you are, now that the snow is gone and the sun is warm, with friends and after a few, or 6, or 8 beers, and the talk becomes coarse and the jokes make a mockery of marriage and you ... laugh hysterically. Social distancing is eased, so you join your friends at the coffee table, and words of juicy, spicy gossip about your neighbor are spoken. There, you are not

too keen about having Jesus around. That is because you have your gods you have designed for yourself -- pride, selfishness, tradition, money, sex, popularity – because what people think of you is far more important to you than what God thinks of you. And you worship in temples made with human hands – banks, homes, career, the toys you have accumulated for your leisure time.

All these gods and idols are exactly the same -- they have built by the opinions of men; yet, these are the gods you are familiar with; and those are the gods you fear, love, and trust in.

And, along comes Paul, babbling about a foreign divinity. He proclaims Jesus and the resurrection. He proclaims a God who does not dwell in a temple made by human hands. He proclaims a God who made all things – the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. He proclaims a God who dwells in human flesh and dwells among us. Paul proclaims a God that is not in need of anything man can offer Him. Rather, He gives you everything you have – your body and soul, clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home (cf. First Article).

In fact, your very life is itself a gift from God. Paul tells you and the Athenians, “And He [God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth (v. 26).” The entire human race came from one man, Adam. And because we all came from the one-man Adam, “sin came into the world through the one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned (Ro 5:12).” You’ve sinned by setting up your idols of your desires and lusts and your own temple of gold, silver, and stone; and you use your time, talents, and treasures to serve them. For that, you deserve to die and suffer in hell for all eternity.

But, Paul proclaims a God who does everything for you, who even saves you from your sin and from yourself. And here's how He did it: He sent His only-begotten Son, Jesus, to dwell in the flesh, to do everything for you. You could not love God or your neighbor because of your sinfulness, so Jesus does that for you, in your place. He is circumcised to willingly place Himself under the Law, and He loves God perfectly and loves your neighbor perfectly for you.

And because you did not love God and your neighbor as yourself, He paid off everything, even your wages of death. He did that by going to the cross. There, God poured out His wrath and punishment upon Jesus in your place. Jesus suffers; He dies; He is buried in the tomb; but the 3rd day He rises again, so that you can have everything – the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. And He gives you that in the means of grace, so that, from the Lord your God, you have everything.

Including this: When you die, your body will not be annihilated as the Epicureans say, but the God who does everything for you, will, on the day of the great judgment, call your body from the grave on the Last Day and re-unite it with your soul, so that body and soul, you will live together with Jesus, forever and ever, without end.

And this: Paul comes along and babbles about Jesus and the resurrection for you. And Jesus and the resurrection means this for you today, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent (v. 30)." Repent. Repent means to turn away from your man-made gods to serve the living God.

Which means that you do not live only for today, living a life of "eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die." Yes, the resurrection of Jesus means that you will rise to eternal life in Jesus Christ. And ... AND ... it also

means that you have been raised from the death of sin, so that sin may not reign in our mortal body, to worship the gods of your belly (cf. Ro 6:12). Jesus says it this way in our Gospel, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (v. 15).”

“He is actually not far from each one of us,” Paul says (v. 27).” Indeed, He isn’t. He is here in the water and the Word; the bread and wine with His body and blood; He’s even here in the words of this babbling speaker to you today. He’s here with His rod and staff to comfort and cheer you. He’s here, this foreign God who has done everything for you and for your salvation.