

Easter 2

30/4/17

“Jesus, Heston and the autopilot...”

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Anybody remember the blockbuster film *Airport 1975*? If you do, perhaps you are showing your age... just like me! At the time the film was released I was all of nine years old. This is a 1975 American air disaster film and was the first sequel to the successful 1970 film *Airport*. The film stars Charlton Heston, Karen Black and George Kennedy, as well as, in her final screen appearance, Gloria Swanson.

The plot concerns the dramatic events aboard an airborne Boeing 747 when a small aircraft crashes into the cockpit causing the fatalities of senior crew...

The one clip that remains etched onto my mind ever since 1975, is the scene where Charlton Heston, the Captain of the Boeing, is immediately blinded by the flying debris into the cockpit. Charlton Heston then calmly reaches across the cockpit dashboard and engages a switch, without fumbling or hesitation. I was absolutely awestruck how any human being could find such a small but crucial switch in a cockpit surrounded by literally hundreds of switches. My father explained to me, after the film, that the switch that was activated was actually the autopilot that ensured the aircraft continued stable flight without any pilot input. The second thing that my father explained to me was that this was the Captain's office... he knew every switch and its location off by heart, even when blinded!

Today is the 2nd Sunday after Easter. We have had two weeks to reflect upon the Risen Lord of Easter Sunday.

The Gospel reading today, namely Luke 24: 13-35 tells of an interesting story about Jesus revealing himself to the disciples.

As we look forward to the Ascension, the question remains, “Are our eyes open to His message of love and hope, or are we blind to His love and hope and merely going through the traditional motions of “churchery?”

We need to be asking ourselves some serious questions during this post-Easter time:

- 1) Are we prepared to make and keep Jesus the centre of our lives after this Passion? Sometimes there is a clear disconnect between what we think and what we do. Jesus calls us to be focused on Him, always. It is no good claiming to be a Christian but only focussing on Jesus on Sundays. This is being blind to the fullness of Christ and what He is able to bring to our lives if we agree to live fully in Him and in everything that we do.

- 2) Are we prepared to continue to grow our faith in Jesus? Faith should never be static. Perhaps just like Charlton Heston reached across and engaged the autopilot in that doomed aircraft, maybe we are also on autopilot sometimes, merely going through the motions of church and liturgical life. To grow our faith as Christians means to challenge ourselves in Jesus, to create a continued depth of spirit, to read, to pray, to fast and to continually seek to be filled by the Holy Spirit.

- 3) Sometimes our faith calls us to be blind too! We cannot always see or understand the plan that God has for our lives. Sometimes we have to step out in faith and believe that God's plan for our lives will come into fruition... no matter what. This is what we can call a "positive blindness". It is a blindness where we are focussed on God and all that He means and does for our life. This is opposed to a negative blindness where we remain closed to God and the Holy Spirit. Which one are you?

- 4) Being open to the love of Jesus is reflected in how we treat one another. Being blind in the faith and spirit often means we are unable to treat each other with grace and love. Jesus calls us to love our neighbours in the same way that He loves us. If we are blind to His love then how can we possibly share His love with each other?

We have options this upcoming period as we look forward to the Ascension:

As a body of Christ we can choose to look at the passion, death and resurrection with the same old blind eyes that merely go through the motions of church life, or we can open our spiritual eyes to a new message of love and hope in Jesus and what He brings to the world. We all have this wonderful opportunity right now to focus anew on the upcoming Ascension and all that this means for our walk with Him.

By choosing to have open spiritual eyes that focus on the will and love of Jesus, we are able to grow in spirit and faith, we are able to challenge our faith so that we can move into an even deeper love of Jesus, we are able to appreciate even more fully the beauty of the Cross and all that it means for our lives in Him.

Having open spiritual eyes means being prepared to continue letting the light of Christ into our lives. For where the light of Jesus shines, we are assured of His love and grace.

Yes, there will be times when we will have to switch on our autopilot switch, just like Charlton Heston did, times when we are spiritually exhausted and fatigued. Our autopilot is our liturgy and worship... this keeps us focussed on the love and grace of God even when we are too tired to do it ourselves, we are carried by our corporate worship. The important challenge for us as Christians is not to rely on that autopilot switch too often... it is good practice for all pilots to do their own flying and landing regularly so as to remain skilled and experienced pilots... we need to be doing exactly the same as growing Christians: reading, praying, fasting and working hard at staying focussed on the love of Jesus for us in our lives and what His message is for us, both as individuals and as a body of Christ.

This upcoming Ascension is all about you.

You and Jesus.

Open your eyes.

See Jesus.

I am reminded of the beautiful words of a song:

*Open our eyes Lord
We want to see Jesus,
To reach out and touch Him
And say that we love Him.*

*Open our ears Lord
And help us to listen,
Open our eyes Lord
We want to see Jesus.*

*Open our eyes Lord
We want to see Jesus,
To reach out and touch Him
And say that we love Him.*

*Open our ears Lord
And help us to listen,
Open our eyes Lord
We want to see Jesus.*

Perhaps it would also be apt to conclude with the well known poem entitled *On His Blindness* by John Milton.

***When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my Soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide;
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er Land and Ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait."***

Are you ready to keep your spiritual eyes open for the light of Jesus this Second Sunday of Easter?

Are you ready to be challenged in your faith and spirit so that you can grow even deeper in His name?

God bless you this week ahead as you experience His overwhelming love and light.

Amen.