

Homily for the 4th Sunday of Easter

April 21-22, 2018

Readings: Acts 4: 8-12; 1 John 3: 1-2; John 10:11-18

Preacher: Ruth Marchetti

In his *New York Times* columns, Nicholas Kristof occasionally remarks on his deep admiration for Christian workers throughout the world who leave behind their comfortable lives to feed, heal, house and teach people who live in very poor parts of the world. Kristoff, a nonreligious person, is struck not just by their actions, but by the way they perform those actions, with such kindness and love. As in those early days described in Acts, Jesus is still working through us to heal the world. There are still people who know that they will never really live until they have lain down their lives for others.

Today's readings are full of images of how God is present in our world. In the reading from Acts, Peter heals a man in Jesus' name. The Psalm praises God's mercy and goodness. The reading from John tells us that, as children of God we grow in God's likeness, revealing God to the world just as our true nature is revealed by the lived example of Jesus.

Finally, in the beautiful image of the Good Shepherd, we see Jesus, who lived his life joyfully to the fullest, willingly laying it down out of love. It's all connected: God present in every one of us; God revealed to ourselves and the world when we quit grasping for material wealth and power and open our hearts to the life God always had in mind for us.

Do we need to leave our families and homes and travel across the world to do that? Well, yes, some do, but not most of us.

In his recent apostolic exhortation, *Rejoice and be Glad*, Pope Francis calls us all to holiness. "The Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. He wants us to be saints and not settle for a bland and mediocre existence." But Francis makes clear that holiness happens in the reality of our lives, not in some reclusive hermitage. "I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God's people; in those parents who raise

their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in the elderly religious who never lose their smile.... Very often it is a holiness found in our next door neighbors, those who, living in our midst, reflect God's presence. We might call them 'the middle class of holiness.'"

Wow—"the middle class of holiness." What a profoundly beautiful image. Pope Francis sees what Nicholas Kristof sees when he says, "Holiness is the most attractive face of the Church." We know all too well that the church has had many other less attractive faces, but holiness has been a constant and remains present in so many today.

"The important thing is that each believer discern his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts, rather than hopelessly imitate something not meant for them."

We are encouraged to see our lives as a mission, allowing ourselves to be transformed by listening, reflecting on what God has in mind for us. That mission is most likely found right where we are, doing the same mundane things we always do, but those actions are no longer mundane when done with great love, with the love of God. So whatever you are doing today—caring for loved ones, teaching, healing, cleaning up other people's messes, righting the wrongs of injustice, healing the harm we've done to God's created world—put it all gently into God's hands.

"Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take none of your energy, vitality or joy," Pope Francis tells us. Be holy as God, in whose image we are made, is holy.