

Rogation Wednesday, 2020, 20 MAY 2020. *Acts 17:15, 22-18:1; John 16:12-15*

The Greeks had Plato, and Aristotle, both of whom tend to a kind of monotheism in their philosophies, so the whole "One God" thing wasn't a deal-breaker for them. The Athenians had centuries of academic argument behind them, St Luke reminds us that they loved nothing more than to argue ideas. That's one of the verses that gets skipped over in today's First Reading. Acts 17:21 reads: "Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new." So the Areopagus was the Twittersphere - constant novelty, constant argument, constant distraction. Paul didn't get very far with all that. He makes a great speech, logical, couched in their own style of discourse, inculturated perfectly, but it doesn't really work. Why? Because Paul does something that throws a spanner in the works. He tells them that the new thing that's happened requires more than just clicking the Like button, knowing God is more than giving a "thumbs-up". This new thing, the Resurrection, calls us to a different way of life. It demands we act.

See, the Greeks had all the intellectual might that could be mustered in the ancient world. They knew it all, the Greeks even knew *about* the God of the Hebrews, but they did not *know* God. Saint Paul gives them a bit of a back-handed compliment when he says they're very religious, because they've built an altar to a god they don't know. Yet, the One True God isn't like one of their Greek gods. He isn't somehow assuaged or placated by cultic actions. Nor is God isn't a mere representation of some concept, as Zeus is the somewhat fickle representation of the sky and of fatherhood.

Human knowledge runs out when faced with the Transcendent God. The only path to knowledge about God's nature, is God's self-disclosure - and this is what we call *revelation*. This is the God Saint Paul is talking about. Not some representation of an aspect of Nature, but rather, the Creator of Nature. Not only did this God reveal himself in his dealings with the Hebrew People, but now as Saint Paul had personally experienced, he had entered the world and taken on flesh in Jesus Christ - a thing gods didn't do, even in the Greek myths - and had allowed himself to be slain in that flesh and had risen again, in that same flesh. The revelation of God, the reality of the resurrection, must, however, be believed, accepted in faith, to have its effect in us.

No matter how logical, reasonable, well-argued your presentation, there are some people who just won't accept or listen to it. All the talk about resurrection was a bit much for some of the Athenians and they laughed it off. Hades was a powerful god in their mythology and defeating him was only possible in their myths, and usually ended in failure. You stayed dead when you died. Resurrection probably sounded like a fairytale to them, and it probably still does to many today. But for all the failure of his attempt, some others believed Saint Paul and went with him to hear more, because they had heard the preaching of one who knew himself personally the risen Christ. We who are gathered around this altar know the risen Christ too, and the more our relationship with him deepens, the more others will want to come to know him as well. They won't listen, necessarily, to the arguments of the great apologists, but they may yet see Jesus in us.