

Brothers and sisters,

Imagine for a minute with me. You're walking down the street in an unfamiliar city and someone comes up to you and asks, "*Are you a Christian?*" I don't want to presume anything, but hopefully you answer affirmatively. "*Great, I've been looking for a Christian! What is Christianity all about anyway?*" Think for a moment. What would you say? Could you tell this stranger what Christianity is all about? Could you tell this stranger what we as Catholic-Christians believe? I think most, if not all, of us understand that Christianity is centered around this person named Jesus and that somehow his death on the cross did something to save us, because he is God's Son and he said we need to believe in him in order to go to Heaven. After all, the most famous Bible verse is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son, so that whoever believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." Depending on the translation, you might know slightly different words, but that is the essence of the verse. All of this, for me, brings up a lot of questions that I think we could reflect on. Hopefully, our reflection can help us fill in some more details about what exactly we believe is going on in the person of Jesus. Here are some questions.

- Who is God? And who is this Son of his, Jesus? How do humans compare to him?
- What was going on that he had to send Jesus to save us? Why did we need to be saved? What was happening before he came?
- How did Jesus save us? I go into the church and I see a crucifix; how does that save me?
- If I have to believe in him in order to go to Heaven, what does it mean to believe in him? By the way, what *is* Heaven? What's the alternative?

Again, I don't want to presume anything of anyone here at our parishes, but I have noticed that a lot of Christians in the year 2022 have some difficulty explaining answers to many/all of these questions. It could be that many of us were never really taught these kinds of things, or maybe we've forgotten them. (Maybe for some of us, we know the answers and this is a boring column!) But can you see that these questions get to the heart of Christianity? We can easily say that the answers to these questions would lay the foundation for what Christianity is all about. It's not sufficient to *merely* tell our stranger-friend that Christianity is all about Jesus dying on the cross for us, because Jesus' death and resurrection don't make sense unless we understand the surrounding context. All of that - the central message of Christianity - can be called the *Kerygma*, which is a Greek word that means *Proclamation*.

In these next few columns, I'm going to slowly walk through the Kerygma, trying to provide you with that context. I am captivated by it, I love it. I hope you do, too. I actually have a five-part presentation series that I intend to present to each parish sometime this year (I'm still trying to find the best time for it, either Advent or Lent), so I won't get into all of the details. But I do hope these can be helpful for you to be captured by what God has done in the person of Jesus, not only for the sake of giving a good answer to our new stranger-friend, but even more for the sake of your own relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

May the Lord give you his peace!
Fr. Bryan