

Reflection for the 3rd Sunday of Easter

In the *New Saint Joseph Sunday Missal*, the reflection for the 3rd Sunday of Easter states, “*every human being starts out as a ‘tabula rasa’ (a smooth tablet, without impressions on it). Only by hard work can a youngster overcome ignorance, gather knowledge in order to achieve insight.*” This reflection in the *New Saint Joseph Sunday Missal*, is suggesting that as Humans created by God, we start with nothing, and it is in this world with our experiences that we then grow in wisdom, understanding and knowledge of God. This can be a great viewpoint when looking at today’s reading. For, in our First Reading this Sunday taken from the Acts of the Apostles St. Peter speaks to the people pointing out to them that it was ignorance that caused the people to deny Jesus Christ before Pilate and ask for the release of Barabbas. St. Peter in the Acts of the Apostles in our First Reading this Sunday is stating that if the people had more knowledge of who Jesus is they would not have betrayed Him before Pontius Pilate. In the Second Reading this Sunday taken from the First Letter of John, St. John informs his readers that he is writing this letter so that they do not commit sin, but if they do commit sin they have an Advocate with the Father and that is His son, Jesus Christ. St. John, in our Second Reading this Sunday is sharing with his readers knowledge that will save them from their sins. Our Gospel Reading today is taken from the Gospel of Luke and in this reading, we hear of Jesus appearing to His disciples on Easter Sunday, and in his conversation with them He helps them to understand sacred scripture, and what it foretells about His coming.

It does seem rather clear in our readings this Sunday that we as humans are *tabula rasa*, blank slates, and it is Jesus Christ who is willing and able to write on our souls what we need to know to follow Him. This is an amazing image that we are given today in our readings. Jesus Christ came into this world for our salvation, He is here to show us the way. Through our baptisms we are born again and washed clean, we have become blank slates, so through the sacraments of the Church, Sacred Scriptures, and the teachings of the Church we will be able to follow Christ in this world and the next.

The Latin phrase “*tabula rasa*” originates from the Roman *tabula*, a wax-covered tablet which was used to take notes. This tablet was cleaned or made blank (*rasa*) by heating the wax and then smoothing it. This roughly equates to the English phrase “blank slate,” which refers to the emptiness of a slate prior to it being written on with chalk. Both the tablet and the slate can be renewed repeatedly by melting the wax of the tablet or erasing the chalk on the slate. This imagery can get us as Catholics to think about the Sacrament of Confession and how with a contrite heart our Lord through the Priest will forgive our sins every time we embrace this Sacrament of healing. Some who are reading this reflection might be thinking to themselves, not so fast Father let us back up and take a look at this “*tabula rasa*.” The idea of being born empty of any built-in mental content assumes that all knowledge comes from later perceptions or sensory experiences. This idea can be seen as the theory of knowledge known as Empiricism. Someone who embraces the theory of Empiricism would disagree with the theory of knowledge known as Innatism or Rationalism, which holds that the mind is born already in possession of certain knowledge or rational capacity. In the end we can arrive at the classic argument of nature versus nurture. Of course, Rationalism versus Empiricism can be much more nuanced than just looking at the argument as nature versus nurture. For those reading this reflection who were worried that they did not have an interesting topic to discuss at Coffee and Donuts this Sunday, your topic might have just been found.

Looking through sacred scripture we would not find it taking sides in the nature versus nurture argument. We can turn to the parable of the talents and find ourselves embracing the nature side, but we can turn to the parable on the prodigal son and embrace the nurture side. This Sunday our readings seem to be embracing the nurture side of the argument, for we are being reminded that Jesus Christ is in our lives to help us dispel ignorance, embrace knowledge, and understand sacred scripture. Jesus Christ, the Sacraments of our Faith, sacred scriptures, and the teachings of our Faith are here to nurture us and help us in our journey of Faith.