

7th Sunday of Easter (B), 2009
Homily – St. Benedict’s Parish
23/24 May 2009

I have a quick question for you.

“How many Catholics does it take to change a light bulb?”

Answer: “1 billion and 1.”¹

“1 Catholic to change the light bulb and a billion Catholics to feel guilty for not helping!”

Can you be *counted on* to help?

Let’s face it Church, Christ *counts* on us.

Let’s take that literally today – Christ *counts* on us –

Did you catch all the numbers and math words in our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles?²

- 120 persons total³
- He was **numbered** among us⁴
- He was **allotted** a share⁵
- They proposed **two**⁶
- Which one of these **two**⁷
- He was **counted**⁸
- With the **eleven**⁹

Jews and early Christians would have deeply appreciated Galileo’s famous quote:

“God wrote the universe in the language of mathematics.”¹⁰

For them, numbers carried symbolic meaning.¹¹

Here too, in our beautiful church, you will find numeric symbolism.

In our transept window to my right you see Jesus with his hand like this [demonstrate].

His two fingers symbolize the Hypostatic Union¹² - the fact that Jesus is both God and man.

His three fingers symbolize the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I am going to speak about numbers in the Bible today.

I encourage all of you to join one of our parish Bible Studies¹³ for more depth,

¹ Approximate number of Catholics in the world.

² The First Reading today - Acts 1:15-17; 20a; 20c-26.

³ See Acts 1: 15.

⁴ See Acts 1:17.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See Acts 1:23.

⁷ See Acts 1:24.

⁸ See Acts 1:26.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Philosophy is written in that great book which ever lies before our eyes — I mean the universe — but we cannot understand it if we do not first learn the language and grasp the symbols, in which it is written. This book is written in the mathematical language, and the symbols are triangles, circles and other geometrical figures, without whose help it is impossible to comprehend a single word of it; without which one wanders in vain through a dark labyrinth.* *The Assayer* (1623), as translated by Thomas Salusbury [sic.] (1661), p. 178, as quoted in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* (2003) by Edwin Arthur Burtt, p. 75. Retrieved from Wikipedia 8 April 2010.

¹¹ I avoided gematria, though I did consider it.

¹² See Second Council of Constantinople: “there is but one hypostasis, which is our Lord Jesus Christ, one of the Trinity” from *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 468.

but here is brief run-down of some of the symbolic numbers in the Bible...

- 3 – symbolizes spiritual perfection; spiritual completion
 - love God with your heart, soul and mind¹⁴
 - our God is not just holy -- but holy, holy, holy!¹⁵
 - three visitors to Abram's tent¹⁶
 - Hebrew Scriptures – Torah, Prophets and Writings¹⁷
 - Jesus' resurrection on the third day¹⁸

- 4 – symbolizes earthly perfection; earthly completion
 - four winds¹⁹
 - four corners of the earth²⁰
 - four living creatures of Ezekiel²¹ and the Book of Revelation²²
 - four cornered garment (tallit)²³
 - four days Lazarus spent in the grave²⁴

Add them together, three plus four, and you get seven. The perfect, complete, number in the Bible.

- seven churches²⁵ and seven trumpets in the Book of Revelation²⁶
- seven times per day to praise God²⁷
- seven loaves and seven baskets left over²⁸
- seven days of the Biblical week²⁹
- not just forgive your neighbor seven times, but seventy seven times!³⁰

This is a good time to note that six is the number that falls short, and three sixes in a row – 6 6 6 – is a very bad number indeed!³¹

Of course, if you *multiply* three and four together you get twelve.

Twelve is the perfect number of community.

It is the number of tribes of Israel³² and the number of the Apostles.³³

In the Book of Revelation the tribes, plus the apostles, gives the twenty-four elders.³⁴

¹³ The parish offers two Bible studies, one run by Carol Mathner, the other by Allan Cecchini.

¹⁴ See Matthew 22:37.

¹⁵ See Isaiah 6:3, liturgically familiar as the *Sanctus*. Also, Revelation 4:8.

¹⁶ See Genesis 18.

¹⁷ TaNaKh.

¹⁸ See Luke 24:7.

¹⁹ See Revelation 7:1.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ See Ezekiel 10:20. Note verse distribution here in NAB.

²² See Revelation 4:6.

²³ See Deuteronomy 22:12.

²⁴ See John 11:17, often proclaimed at funeral Masses.

²⁵ See Revelation chapters 1 through 3.

²⁶ See Revelation 8:2.

²⁷ See Psalm 119:164. Note structure of the Liturgy of the Hours.

²⁸ See Matthew 15:32-39.

²⁹ See Genesis 1:31-2:4a.

³⁰ See Matthew 1:21-22.

³¹ See Revelation 13:18.

³² See Moses blessing of the tribes in Deuteronomy chapter 33 for example.

³³ Today's First Reading shows the importance of having a complete twelve - Acts 1:15-17; 20a; 20c-26.

³⁴ See Revelation 4:4.

Twelve times a hundred, it is the number of years Moses lived³⁵ and the number of the early Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles.³⁶

Twelve times twelve with three zeros after it – 144,000 - symbolizes the immense number of people saved in the Book of Revelation.³⁷

While all of this is good to know and sheds light on many Bible passages, it isn't enough. It is never enough to just know the Bible! Scripture must be fulfilled in your hearing!³⁸ The Bible is not a book of facts to be learned and memorized, but the very word of God, living and active.³⁹

Did you hear Peter in our first reading today...? "Scripture had to be fulfilled..."⁴⁰
Did you hear Jesus in today's gospel...? "in order that the scripture might be fulfilled..."⁴¹

Scripture must be fulfilled here and now. And so it is.
The Word of God becomes flesh and dwells among us.⁴²
We hear Him, and we eat His Body and drink His Blood.
And Scripture is fulfilled.

Ultimately that's the big lesson today:
We are all *one* in Christ!
A Church in communion!

We are *one* family, around *one* altar with "*one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism, *one* God and Father of all,"⁴³
In "one place together,"⁴⁴
awaiting *one* Holy Spirit at Pentecost in
One, holy catholic and apostolic Church.⁴⁵

We know through Scripture and Tradition that Christ is here.
On the corner of Main and Eggert.⁴⁶
Christ is here!

Be counted among his disciples!

³⁵ See Deuteronomy 34:7.

³⁶ See Acts 1:15.

³⁷ See Revelation 7:4-8.

³⁸ In addition to the words of Jesus in today's Gospel pericope, I was thinking of *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly*, authored by the Bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry, NCCB, 1979.

³⁹ See Hebrews 4:12.

⁴⁰ Acts 1:16.

⁴¹ John 17:12.

⁴² See John 1:14.

⁴³ See Ephesians 4:5.

⁴⁴ Acts 2:1.

⁴⁵ From the *Profession of Faith*.

⁴⁶ I was thinking of the song "You Found Me," *The Fray*, album released 3 February 2009.