

Texts of the devotions on April 25, 2021 (Jubilate)

Music (Ulrike Jerosch, piano)

Joseph Haydn: Sonata for piano in C major, Hob. XVI:10 (*Moderato*)

Text for the sermon (Acts of the Apostles 17: 22-34, read by Ulrike Vauth)

²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

²⁴ “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸ ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’^[a] As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’^[b]

²⁹ “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” ³³ At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴ Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+17%3A+22-34&version=NIV>

Music (Ulrike Jerosch, piano)

Joseph Haydn: Sonata for piano in C major, Hob. (*Menuet and Trio*)

Sermon (Pastor Michaela Langenheim)

Peace be with us – from God our father, our brother and friend Jesus Christ, and in the virtue of the Holy Spirit.

Dear parishioners, I assume that most of us are Protestant, or at least have been christened. At our baptism we were physically present, but not mentally developed enough to be able to consent. We made up for that in our confirmation. You may remember your confirmation, and it will perhaps not be too overshadowed by the

experience of the time leading up to it, which sometimes was boring and taxing with all the services and the memorizing. But you may remember this day of your confirmation, when you were asked: *Do you want to be baptized? Do you want to belong to God?* – and you answered, *I do*. And I must say, I have had the privilege to accompany quite a few confirmands; not one of them answered this question off-handedly. These young adults were aware: This is the first time that I am taken seriously as a human being able to decide which religion I want to believe in. And they have all come – friends, family, the community; and then the blessing and often the first Eucharist – you do not forget such a day. At the same time, this is just a moment. The faith began earlier – in childhood, or perhaps in Religious Education at school or in preparation for the confirmation. And after the confirmation the story goes on with ups and downs, and again and again we have to ask ourselves: Is it still correct what we said then? Do we still want to be Christians?

On this path of faith, contact with other religions can be fruitful, and Paul knew about that as he was standing in Athens in the Areopagus, the political hub as it were, and was looking at the altars of the many gods and found one altar with the inscription: *To the Unknown God*. Paul took this altar as a starting point to talk about God's actions in Jesus Christ, and in his speech, he took up the things his own belief had in common with the belief of the Athenians. And so he said, *Yes, God created the world*. But then he went on to say that God did not want to be venerated in temples and buildings, and that he does not want to be served, because, ultimately, he created everything, and everything comes from him – he does not need our service. What he needs – and this is what we have just heard in the lection – is that we seek God, that we are to feel him and to find him. The reason God set us into this life is for us to seek, feel and find him. Not our performance at work, not something great that we have to experience, is why we live, but, according to Paul, the reason is that God wants to be found.

Well, for the Greeks then, that was a pretty wild assumption, and to my mind it still is, and for us, too. Is it the meaning of my life to find God? Where would I place him? For Paul, all humans are of divine descent, irrespective of their religion. That is the basis we have in common. But in Jesus Christ God showed himself in a very unique way – and not just in his life, but first and foremost in the resurrection, which we celebrated at Easter, and where God demonstrated: *I am life – and life is stronger than death*. For the Greeks who listened to him then, this was scandalous. They ridiculed him, they put off the topic of the resurrection, because in essence it simply meant that for Paul God was a zombie, as we would say in modern language. In the end, only few people followed Paul's path of faith and became Christians; Dionysius and Damaris are mentioned, and a handful of others. It was only much later that many Athenians became Catholic Christians, but that was a process, a process that has continued to this day. And it is especially in these last few months and in these extraordinary times that I see ourselves being tested: What actually is the basis of our faith? Who is God? Does he sustain us? Or have church and faith become irrelevant for society? Some people find these questions frightening. I would say they are nothing out of the ordinary, they have cropped up for years, for centuries. Instead, they are a gift to help us figure out: What truly sustains us? So that we do not deceive ourselves, do not find cheap solutions, but support each other on our way to seek God. Looked at that way, we are all of us preparing for our confirmation, and we can make use of this time – in the Open Church here, every Sunday morning, or in prayer – but also to talk with each other. In the Catholic community, in front of

the church, every Wednesday from 1 pm to 3 pm, there is the offer to come together and have a cup of tea – in compliance with corona rules. Do come, make use of the time! Together let us try to find what sustains us – especially now. Amen.
And the peace of God, which is higher than all our reason, keep and protect us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Music (Ulrike Jerosch, piano)

Joseph Haydn: Sonata for piano in C major, Hob. – Finale (*Presto*)

The Lord's Prayer

Vater unser im Himmel.	Our Father in heaven.
Geheiligt werde dein Name.	Hallowed be your name.
Dein Reich komme.	Your kingdom come.
Dein Wille geschehe,	Your will be done,
wie im Himmel, so auf Erden.	as in heaven, so on earth.
Unser tägliches Brot gib uns heute.	Give us today our daily bread.
Und vergib uns unsere Schuld,	And forgive us our sins,
wie auch wir vergeben unsern Schuldigern.	as we forgive those who sin against us.
Und führe uns nicht in Versuchung,	Lead us not into temptation,
sondern erlöse uns von dem Bösen.	but deliver us from evil.
Denn dein ist das Reich und die Kraft	For the kingdom, the power
und die Herrlichkeit in Ewigkeit.	and the glory are yours now and forever.
Amen.	Amen.