

Gospel – Luke 21:12-19

Jesus said to the crowd:

"They will seize and persecute you,
they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons,
and they will have you led before kings and governors
because of my name.
It will lead to your giving testimony.
Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand,
for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking
that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute.
You will even be handed over by parents,
brothers, relatives, and friends,
and they will put some of you to death.
You will be hated by all because of my name,
but not a hair on your head will be destroyed.
By your perseverance you will secure your lives."

Homily – Name the Values of Jesus

Today's Gospel from Luke is a stark reminder of the persecution that the Church has faced for the last 2,000 years, because of proclaiming the name and the values of Jesus. Bishop Baron, in a commentary on this passage, asked the question, "When will the church cease to be persecuted?" The answer is, "only when Christ comes again in the second coming."

To speak truth to power, to proclaim the gospel of Jesus, to proclaim the name of Jesus, is inevitably going to infuriate the powers of evil. Goodness. Truth. Love. Non-violence. The name of Jesus will always infuriate the evil one and the ways in which the evil one is operating.

It's naïve on our part to expect that the Kingdom is going to be fully realized within our own lifetime. The call for us is, I think, to be in solidarity with those places of the Church that are actively persecuted for proclaiming the Gospel. The 20th century was the bloodiest century on record. More people were killed in violent conflicts and wars in the 20th century than any other. There were more Christian martyrs in the 20th century than in any other time in history. That persecution continues, especially, unfortunately, in Muslim countries.

When I led a pilgrimage in 2001 over to the Holy Land, we spoke to Fr. Peter Vasco who continues, to this day, to run the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land. He made the observation that in 50 years, the Holy Land is in danger of not having any Christians at all because the Christians there are persecuted both by the Muslims and by the Jews. The most oppressed minority in the Holy Land today are the Christians. We want to lift up our brothers and sisters around the world that are actively persecuted for the sake of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus by radical elements that don't stand for God's truth but simply stand for their own agenda.

There are many, even within our own country, who have had to give their life because of mass murderers that have broken into schools and broken and the churches; most recently in Texas. Just think of those people that were worshiping Jesus when a mass murderer came in and wiped out many members of the congregation simply because they were proclaiming the name of Jesus. Much more likely is persecution when we stand up for the values of Jesus: If we stand up against racism...against oppression of the poor...for the rights of the unborn.

Today is the death anniversary of Dorothy Day, the great Catholic social activist, and co-founder with Peter Maurin of the Catholic Social Worker movement. Dorothy Day led a lifestyle of sexual promiscuity as a youth. She had an abortion. She had a child out of wedlock but then experienced a profound conversion and started living her Catholic, Christian faith in a radical way. She went to daily Mass. She especially stood for the social teachings of the church; for the corporal works of mercy. As a result of that, she found herself often thrown in jail as she opposed the Vietnam War; as she stood in solidarity with the farmworkers; as she raised her voice consistently on behalf of the poor; as she stood in solidarity with alcoholics and drug addicts, saying, "the Lord loves you as well."

Another one of my great heroes is Fr. Daniel Berrigan, a Jesuit who stood against the Vietnam War and who went to jail as a result of his nonviolent objections to that war. I remember when I was teaching at Loyola University a number of years ago, Fr. Berrigan was invited. It was in the midst of the first Gulf War and some of the students on campus had signs that said "F President Bush." Fr. Berrigan called them out and said:

"President Bush is not the enemy here. You may stand against his political perspective, and I stand against his political perspective, but he's not the enemy. We're called to love President Bush, to stand against policies that we disagree with, but Jesus calls us to love our enemies and not to vilify our opponents. If we do that, all we do is create a deeper divide within this country. Let's enter into a dialogue and by nonviolent loving of those who disagree with us, attempt to win them over."

That made a deep impression on me because the young radicals on campus thought that they would they would be winning Fr. Berrigan's favor by saying, you know, let's get rid of this President whom we hate and Fr. Berrigan stood up to them and he said, "No that's not the Gospel. That's not what it's about."

Another contemporary hero of mine is David Daleiden. He is the young man who directs the Center for Medical Progress, the organization that brought about all of these undercover videos that expose the seamy underside of Planned Parenthood; of their selling body parts at a profit to organizations around the country. David Daleiden has undergone one lawsuit after another, and even at this point, he has several lawsuits that if they go through will have him thrown in jail for possibly decades of his life. It's one lawsuit after another and the courts have suppressed some of the evidence saying, "No, these undercover videos cannot be exposed." Some of them are the most damaging evidence to date. David continues to speak truth to power and to do it, I believe, in a courageous way.

Our Catholic bishops have stood up for the rights of the oppressed within our country. They have challenged our immigration policies. They have challenged that the DACA program was canceled with no political solution in sight for those undocumented children who were brought to this country and who have known no other culture but American culture. The Catholic bishops have challenged our tax system that, in their view, unfairly disadvantages the working poor within this country.

If we stand up for the Gospel message, we're going to be embroiled in controversies. How we act in the face of those controversies has everything to do with whether I believe we're truly disciples of Jesus. If we simply become another angry voice saying: *I got the truth and you don't*. What good does that do except further exacerbate the divide within this country? If we stand up for the values that we believe in, and we do that in a loving way, and we're willing, like I believe David Daleiden is, he's standing up to the abortion industry, but he doesn't do that with hatred. Just as when Fr. Berrigan stood up to those radical youths, he didn't do that by vilifying them. Or Dorothy Day as she stood up for the farmworkers or stood up for the derelicts in skid row. She didn't do that with hatred. Just as when Jesus stood up for the truth of His life, there was no hatred in His heart.

My brothers and sisters it's so easy to give in to the hatred. It's so difficult to love our enemies; to stand up for those values; to stand up in the face of people who are screaming at us saying: *How come you're disagreeing with my agenda?* (Whatever it is.) It's exceedingly difficult not to be intimidated and not to give in to that hatred; to not respond with an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, hatred for hatred. I think that's the test of our Gospel message today. Can we embrace this truth even in the face of those who oppose what we believe to be the truth; or that which is sacred to us? Let's pray for that gift as we enter into this Mass and pray for our brothers and sisters who are putting their lives on the line for the sake of believing in Jesus. Amen. (Amen.)