

Thirty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time; November 17, 2013

Luke 21:5-19

Last week Fr. Glenn spoke about the heroic witness of the Jewish mother and her seven sons, who were brutally tortured and killed, one by one, for refusing to break the Law of God. The message for today is basically the same: despite the trials and tribulations of this world, if we remain steadfast in our faith in God, we will receive our reward in the world to come.

This is not all that unusual. The Church will often give us similar themed readings in order to drive home a particular point she feels a need to emphasize during certain times of the year. The idea to remain strong and steadfast in our faith is appropriate as we approach the end of the liturgical year. Next Sunday will be the Solemnity of Christ the King, which marks the last Sunday of the liturgical year. The following Sunday will be the First Sunday of Advent, and yes, Christmas is just around the corner. The end of this liturgical year is a little bit special. The Church is closing out the “Year of Faith”. The year Pope Benedict proclaimed to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council and the 20th anniversary of the publishing of the Catechism. Here at IHM we have had a number of faith initiatives such as retreats, parish missions, Bible studies, opportunities for prayer, opportunities for charitable work, guest speakers, video series, studies on Vatican II documents, studies on the Catechism, etc. all with the intention to provide the people of this parish opportunities to learn and grow in your faith.

Of course we are not going to stop all of these efforts just because the “Year of Faith” is coming to an end; the opportunities will continue, but the decision to grow in your faith, to walk the path of discipleship, has to come from your own heart, no one else can do that for you. Jesus makes it very clear that becoming his disciple is not going to lead to an easy life, especially when he says things like, *“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.”* Or, *“You will even be handed over by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they*

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Luke 21:5-19

will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name.” The consequences of becoming a Christian, of associating oneself with his name, frankly do not sound all that attractive. Why then should we make that decision to become a follower of Jesus Christ? I really don’t want to be hated, or persecuted, or killed. None of that sounds very pleasant. What is it about Jesus that would make us even want to think about enduring these kinds of trials?

Well, we are all here tonight/today because we want to grow in our faith. We are here because of who Jesus is. He is the Son of God. He died for us, so that we would have eternal life. That is the correct answer, but relating those important concepts to our daily life can be difficult. However, we can look to Jesus’ life to help us make that connection. One of the primary things that Jesus did, while he walked the earth, was to challenge everyone he met with the idea that they were meant for more; that they were meant to be living lives full of meaning and purpose. We are meant to find that meaning and purpose by loving God and loving our neighbor. Jesus calls us all to holiness. Everyone he met from the woman at the well, Zacchaeus, the rich young man, the woman caught in adultery and her accusers, the Scribes and the Pharisees were all confronted with a choice to either follow him in holiness or to walk away.

So how do we go about choosing to grow in holiness? In his book “The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic”, Matthew Kelly makes the point that people struggle with the idea of holiness. I believe it is because, when we hear the word holiness, we automatically think that is something for someone else. Holiness is for the Saints; it is not something that I can do. What Kelly does is substitute the phrase “*Becoming the best version of myself*” for “*growing in holiness*”. Now I admit when I first read that, I thought that sounds a little too commercial, too self-helpish. But if you think about it, it does make sense. Kelly says, “*When you work hard and pay attention to the details of your work, you grow in virtue and character – and holiness.*”

Thirty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time; November 17, 2013

Luke 21:5-19

When you are patient with your little sister or a customer that drives you crazy, you become more perfectly who God created you to be – and you grow in holiness. When you develop a daily routine of prayer and practice it persistently, you develop a closer relationship with God – and you grow in holiness. Every moment has meaning.” This means those daily decisions we are constantly making about what to do and what to say are where we are choosing whether or not to follow Christ. Every time we choose to “*become that better version of ourselves*”, we are growing in holiness, we are growing closer to Christ. This is why we follow him, because we want to become the best version of ourselves, we want to become the person that God made us to be. We want to serve God in this life and be with Him in the next.

Today our Lord tells us that there is a cost to our discipleship. People rejected Jesus when he walked the earth, and he tells us they will reject his followers today. People rejected Him, because He either said or did something that they just could not accept or just could not believe. Ultimately, the reason he was tried and crucified was that Jesus made the claim that he was the Son of God. The Jewish authorities could not accept his claim of divinity. They could not reconcile their belief in “One God”, the belief that had defined them as a people, with who Jesus claimed to be. And so, all those terrible things Jesus says will happen to his disciples, happened to him. He was betrayed by his close friend, a man who walked with him every day for the better part of three years, a man who was like a brother to him. He was captured, imprisoned, hauled before Kings and Governors, and finally put to death on a Cross. Then something else happened, something that he also says will happen to his disciples. He was raised up from the dead on the third day. Not a hair on his head was destroyed, and by his obedience to his Father’s will, by his perseverance in faith, his eternal life was secured.

Thirty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time; November 17, 2013

Luke 21:5-19

Jesus' claim to be the Son of God was certified by his resurrection, yet still the world rejects him. St. John the Evangelist explains the world's hatred saying, "*Rejection lies in this, that when the light came into the world men preferred darkness to light; Preferred it because their doings were evil. Anyone who acts shamefully hates the light and will not come into the light, for fear that his doings will be found out.*" Fulton Sheen states this same thought another way, "*The truth which he brought, men recognized as a claim on their allegiance, because they were made for it; but since they had perverted their natures by evil behavior, His truth stirred their consciences and they despised it.*"

The world despises Jesus because his message, his truth, demands a change of heart, demands we become that better version of ourselves. Jesus does make that claim on our heart's allegiance. A claim that says we will find meaning and purpose in our lives by putting away our old selfish and sinful ways and taking up his way; the way of self-giving love. This is what it means to be a disciple. It means making those daily choices to grow in holiness. It means no longer doing things my way, but his way. This is the path Jesus promises will lead us to eternal life.

However, Jesus also promises that this path will be challenging and full of difficulty. He tells us that following this path means we will encounter resistance from the "spirit of the world". If your example is his example, you will disturb consciences, you will encounter resistance. If you are a young woman trying to live a chaste life in this society that says your only valued for you appearance, and how you can be used; you know what that resistance feels like. If you have ever stood up for life, by praying for the end of abortion, while standing in front of Planned Parenthood on the corner of San Mateo and Marquette; you know what that resistance feels like. If you have ever stood up in public or maybe posted on Facebook that you

Thirty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time; November 17, 2013

Luke 21:5-19

agree with the Church's teaching that marriage is between one man and one woman; you know what that resistance feels like. If your way follows his way, you will be a sign of contradiction that calls all those around you to repentance and conversion. Some will be drawn to you because of your example; others will persecute you with all the fury the world can bring. When that happens, and it seems all the power of the world is bearing down upon you, you must not lose heart, for there is great comfort and courage to be found in our Lord's promise; that he will not abandon you in your hour of need. You will not be standing alone. He will be there with you, and *"not a hair on your head will be destroyed. By your perseverance you will secure your lives."*