

Reflection for the 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

On Saturday, September 19, 2020 we as a Church celebrated the feast of St. Januarius who was a Bishop and Martyr dying in the year 305 AD. According to tradition St. Januarius the Bishop of Naples in Italy, received word that Deacons Sossus and Proclus were recently imprisoned with Euticius and Acutius by the Roman Emperor Diocletian. They were imprisoned because of their faith. Bishop Januarius upon hearing of their imprisonment planned on visiting them in jail, Januarius along with Festus and Desiderius were found out and arrested on their way to perform this work of mercy. Tradition holds that all seven men were sentenced to death and thrown to wild beasts. When the beasts refused to attack them, the men were then beheaded.

St. Januarius was born in Benevento to a rich patrician family that trace their ancestry to the Caudini tribe of the Samnites. At the age of 15, Januarius became a local priest of the parish in Benevento. At the age of 20 he became Bishop of Naples and befriended Juliana of Nicomedia and St. Sossius whom he met during his priestly studies. During the 1 ½ year persecution of the Catholic Church by Emperor Diocletian, Januarius hid his fellow Christians and prevented them from being caught. Today St. Januarius is famous for the miracle of the liquefaction of his blood, which according to tradition was saved by Eusebia. She collected his blood right after his martyrdom. To this day people gather in the Naples Cathedral three times a year: on the Feast Day of St. Januarius September 19, on December 16 the day that commemorates the fact that St. Januarius is one of the Patron Saints of Naples, and on the Saturday before the first Sunday of May which commemorates the relics of St. Januarius. On these three days every year the blood of St. Januarius returns to a liquid state.

Over the centuries many have tried to explain how the blood of St. Januarius returns to a liquid state. While seeking an explanation for this event can be interesting, one might miss the point of why this event is taking place. St. Januarius followed the example of Jesus Christ and shed his blood for others. All miracles, those we witness and those we read or hear about provide us with an opportunity to grow in faith and discover the message of the miracle. The same can be said for the parables of Jesus that are found in the New Testament. All the parables that Jesus shared with us provide us an opportunity to grow in faith and discover the message of each parable.

This Sunday in our Gospel reading taken from the Gospel of Matthew we hear of the parable of the landowner who hires workers for his vineyard and pays everyone the same wage, even though some work for a few hours and others work all day. This parable that Jesus shares with His disciples in the Gospel of Matthew is informing them and all who are privileged to hear this parable that we are all offered the opportunity of eternal Salvation. Whether we follow Christ our whole life or for just a part of our lives once we choose to follow Him, we have the opportunity of eternal Salvation.

In regards to the relic of St. Januarius and the parable of the generous landowner it is easy to focus on the details and they can be rather interesting, but we can get lost in the details to the point that we are not able to hear or embrace the true message that is found in the relic and the parable. Be it relics, miracles, scriptures, sacraments, devotions and more, our faith has so much to offer us as we journey in this world looking forward to the eternal Kingdom. The richness of our faith is there to point us in the direction of our Heavenly Father. There are layers of meaning to all that we do and as we look into the meaning and message of all the aspects of our faith and tradition we can deepen our love of God and have a greater appreciation of our faith. But may we avoid getting caught up in the details to the point that we forget that our Faith is there to help us in our journey in this world looking forward to the eternal Kingdom.