

Homily of 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B (09-23-18)

The first reading from the Book of Wisdom was a prophecy of what would happen to Jesus in the hands of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Scribes and the Chief Priests. Jesus challenged and reproached them for transgressions and violations of God's Commandment. For this reason, with revilement and torture they put Jesus to tests and trials, and condemned him to a shameful death. But God took care of Jesus and raised him from death.

As the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Chief priests took offense at Jesus, sometimes, we take offense at those who challenge us, and those who correct our ignorance and wrong doing. As Jesus was crucified; in the same way, many people have lost life because they challenged injustice in the system and in society. Many people have lost their jobs, and many have lost their positions because of their stand against injustice.

Innumerable African Americans suffered martyrdom because they stood against injustice. A few names among them come to mind: Emmett Till was murdered in 1955, Medgar Evers in 1963, Malcolm X in 1965, Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. Numerous people were killed during the Civil Rights Movement and riots. The supreme price these people paid is not in vain looking at the progress made, so far, in the area of freedom and equality for all in the country.

Considering their history, African Americans should have been the most hard working, wisest, most progressive, and most united among all races on the face of the earth. The life of every black person should have been precious to all black people. St. James addresses the problems in our black communities in the second reading: "Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice... Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members? You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war. You do not possess because you do not ask. You ask but do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." Let us pray that we do not take offense and destroy one another. Rather, let us do all we can to build up one another. Jesus says, "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."

In the Gospel, Jesus took a child, "placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it he said to them, 'Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me.'" A child needs help, protection, support, cannot be left by him/herself or to fend for him/herself. Therefore, the child Jesus speaks of, are the sick, the weak, the hungry, the elderly, the lonely, the refugees, the immigrants, the prisoners, the homeless. As I mentioned in last Sunday's homily, we need to periodically evaluate ourselves on what works of charity we have done to those in need, those who cannot pay us back?

Let us not be like the apostles who were blinded by selfish ambition and were more concerned with who among them was the greatest while ignoring his imminent passion and death that Jesus told them about. May God heal our blindness that we may be able to see who and where we can help.

I would like to conclude with this sad story. Fr. Charles Ebele, the pastor of St. Jude Thaddeus Catholic Church, Inoma, Anambra state, Nigeria, lost his life on Friday, September 14, 2018, when the speed boat he was travelling on sank in the River Niger. An eye witness said that Fr. Charles gave his life jacket to someone in the boat who did not have a life jacket. The person survived. Fr. Charles did not. When I spoke to you on the present crises in the Catholic Church, I mentioned that hundreds of thousands of priests are living lives of sacrifice. Fr. Charles is an example. Let us be encouraged.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP