

Homily of Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B, 2021

Isaiah 50:4-9; Psalm 116:1-6, 8-9; James 2:14-18; Mark 8:27-35

The first reading is Prophet Isaiah's prophesy about the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheek to those who pluck my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting. I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame." In the Gospel of today, Jesus referred to this prophesy, "The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days" (Mark 8:31). Also, Jesus did exactly what Isaiah prophesied: "When the days for his being taken up were fulfilled, he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51).

The first reading, however, reminds us of what may come our way as followers of Jesus. There will be times when our backs will be beaten, our beard plucked, our face buffeted and spat upon. Jesus prepares our mind in John 15:20, "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also." Then he promises us, "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. (Matthew 5:11-12). During the time of any affliction we are to set our "face like flint," that is, we are to "resolutely" keep faith and believe that our God will not allow us to be put to shame. Jesus sets the standard for us, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the Gospel will save it" (Mark 8:34-35).

The Gospel says, "Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do'" (Mark 8:33). At that moment, Peter was a voice of discouragement in the mission of Jesus. Jesus immediately quietened the voice of discouragement. If Jesus, who is God, encountered difficulties, criticisms, oppositions, sufferings, discouragements, and frustrations, then, the same experiences await us who are his followers. When these experiences come our way, let us not surrender to them. Let us draw strength from Jesus; and like him, let us be strong and resolute. On the other hand, let us not be forces of discouragement to anyone by our words and actions.

St. James instructs us in the second reading another very important way of witnessing Christ and expressing our faith; that is, to do good work especially to strangers and the needy whom we will get nothing in return. St. James says, "What does it profit, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?" (James 2:14). St. James concludes, "Faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:20). Each one of us needs to evaluate oneself, periodically, and ask oneself; apart from the good works one does to one's family, relatives, friends, in work or in business places, what good work does one do to people in need, especially strangers and those who cannot pay back? Jesus challenges us in Luke 6:32-35, "For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, and get back the same amount."

St. James asks us, "If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it?" (James 2:15-16). Uttering false compassionate words and not helping when we could have helped is wrong and sinful.

Jesus challenges us the times we claim to have faith but lack good works, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). St. Francis of Assisi is quoted to have said to his friars, "Preach the Gospel, and if necessary use words." He also said to them, "Let all brothers preach by their works." These words are for us today. We call ourselves Catholic Christians. Therefore, let our faith be expressed, not only in words, but also in good deeds. Let us pray for the grace to become what we profess. Amen.

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