

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, May 16th 2013

Today, the Society of Jesus celebrates the feast of Jesuit martyr Andrew Bobola. Andrew was born of a Polish family in 1590, entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1611 and was ordained a priest in 1622. He was well known for his preaching and the care of the sick during an epidemic in Poland. During that time, Roman Catholics were being subjected to attacks and persecutions by Protestants and schismatics (organized groups of former Catholics encouraging Catholics to leave the Church).

Father Bobola was hounded by the schismatics in their attempt to hamper Andrew's efforts to bring back to the Church those who had left. On May 16 in 1657, he was seized, dragged by a horse, tortured, including burning and flaying portions of his body, and ultimately killed by a sword. Andrew Bobola was canonized by Pope Pius XII on May 16, 1957, three hundred years after his death. (Source: Catholic Encyclopedia).

Clearly, Andrew Bobla was a man of extraordinary courage . . . a courage rooted in his love for Jesus. In today's first reading from Acts, Paul finds himself in a very serious and life-threatening situation with the Jewish leaders arguing over whether there is resurrection from the dead. Paul is rescued by a military commander and placed in a compound where that night, Jesus appeared to him and said: "Take Courage."

An act of courage that comes to my mind are those first responders to the injured in the Boston (USA) marathon last month. They moved to help those in need with swiftness and seemingly no fear of danger like another bomb exploding.

As Christians, we are called, like Paul and Andrew, to be courageous. Now of course that is easily said and not so easily done. If you and I really believed that the loving care of God is within us and surrounds us, what is there to fear in our lives? We should be ready for any surprise or surprises that come our way.

I have a friend who died a couple of years ago from cancer. When he was first diagnosed he was told that he would not survive beyond a year or so from this type of cancer. He was shocked and bewildered, since he had always been in superb health and was blessed with a wonderful wife and three teenage children. He was also blessed with a deep spiritual life. He told me one day after being diagnosed that he wanted to live to see his children have children and to spend more years with the love of his life, his wife. His grief and sadness about leaving his family and friends behind was enormous. But, he also said that he believed that God would be there at his death and will continue to be there with his family. Like Andrew and Paul, he accepted this surprise in his life with courage and faith. Could you do the same, whatever the surprise is in your life?

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