

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Oct 17th 2013

Today is the Feast Day of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, an early martyr of the church. It is said that this St Ignatius was possibly held by Jesus as a baby and studied with some of the original apostles. He greatly influenced many through his writings some of which were written on his way to die in the Coliseum in Rome. Saint Ignatius's most famous quotation, however, comes from his letter to the Romans:

I am writing to all the Churches and I enjoin all, that I am dying willingly for God's sake, if only you do not prevent it. I beg you, do not do me an untimely kindness. Allow me to be eaten by the beasts, which are my way of reaching to God. I am God's wheat, and I am to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, so that I may become the pure bread of Christ.

As I reflected on his words, I wondered how he could be so calm in the face of his pending death (and being a meal for lions, one that definitely would not be peaceful). I would expect most, including me, would want to run in the opposite direction. I pondered this for a number of days – how did the early Christians and many now be so brave in their faith. How does one keep “the faith?” As so often happens to me, I heard my answers in the words of Christian songs. I could imagine St. Ignatius saying the words of Chris Tomlin . . .

Whom shall I fear?

I know Who goes before me

I know Who stands behind

The God of angel armies

Is always by my side

and those from the Building 429 song, We Won't Be Shaken:

. . . But I know that You go with me so I will never fear

I will trust in You

Whatever will come our way

Through fire or pouring rain

We won't be shaken

No, we won't be shaken

These Christians of long ago and many now really “get it!” This life here is just a brief stop in this fabulous journey. As they stood in the arenas long ago or in the face of danger now – they were/are not shaken, they stood/stand with angel armies and know what is ahead is the real prize. That the best is yet to come. But how will I know I will get there?

The responsorial psalm is about mercy and redemption. And again, I kept hearing songs about redemption as I prepared to write this. Funny, how that always seems to work for me. The words from a Big Daddy Weave song stuck in my mind all week:

. . . Then You look at this prisoner and say to me "son

Stop fighting a fight it's already been won"

I am redeemed, You set me free

So I'll shake off these heavy chains

Wipe away every stain, now I'm not who I used to be

I am redeemed, I'm redeemed

Jesus has already won the battle for us – we can reap the benefits. You may feel you have been at a concert as you read this, but it is through music that I am most often able to make sense of what is happening to me. I hear the voice of God so clearly in the many songs I am blessed to hear. I will leave with one last thought about redemption. This time in the semester is very busy – we had no break from summer, fall is moving fast with lots of demands and the planning for spring and summer is in full swing. I sometimes feel that I can't take a breath. Then . . . I turn on the radio or slip a CD into my computer to play in the background and I find peace and strength to continue – I remember this is just a brief stop. My journey, hopefully, will be full of joy and God will be pleased by the legacy I leave behind. The words from this Tenth Avenue North song are what gets me through these days:

I know that you can give me rest

So I cry out with all that I have left.

Let me see redemption win.

Let me know the struggle ends.

That You can mend a heart that frail and torn

I want to know that a song can rise from the ashes of a broken life.

And all that's dead inside can be reborn.

Nancy Shirley