

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Apr 30th 2014

Today's readings present a challenge for us: what will we do with the light we have?

In the first reading, the Apostles had an encounter with an angel of the Lord, who opened the doors of the prison, led them outside, and then said, "Go and take your place in the temple area, and tell the people everything about this life." They did this, teaching and sharing with the people in fulfillment of this broad mandate, even after being jailed.

I imagine that thoughts of leaving the scene quietly and escaping also passed through their minds.

Should we count on another miraculous event of deliverance if they come get us again? But the Apostles went on living in the light. That took courage – accepting freedom meant continuing to live in tension. The angel did not deliver them from the world full of threats, which would still have been there if they had fled. This life is punctuated with challenges that simply cannot be eliminated; we have to do our best to live in the midst of them.

I read stories this week about the experiences of prisoners of war during their captivity. In the midst of very cruel treatment, their love for one another and their faith got them through it. One man commented that "courage is only fear that has said its prayers." That is such a powerful observation – how often during the Lenten journey did we encounter our fears and our need to be released from them! And do we have the courage to go and take our place, to live in the light, like the Apostles did in this story? Maybe if our fear says its prayers, we can.

Unfortunately, the high priest and his companions provide a counterexample, as jealousy and fear seem to be motivating forces for them to continue on the path of suppression. Despite encountering miraculous events, they could not get their minds around the possibility that they might be on the wrong side of the work that God was doing. Fear and jealousy (which must be a close cousin to fear) have the power to blind and bind us in ways that seem puzzling when we are observing them from outside. But when we are under their power, that can be hard to see, indeed.

The Gospel reading for today illustrates that same tension of living in light. Jesus tells Nicodemus about the way of salvation, which was rooted in God's act of love in sending his Son. The act of love reflected in the incarnation of our Lord, his life, death, and resurrection, is a witness of light. We judge ourselves, in a sense, by our reaction to that light. Will we suppress the light because of fear? Or come to live in the light in spite of our weaknesses and fears? Alas, we hold onto many false comforts because of our sins, which we think we cannot bear to give up. May God grant us faith and courage so that we can draw near to him and live in the light. Thanks be to God.

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