

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Oct 28th 2014

Life as a stranger is uncomfortable, to say the least. Each of us has probably experienced the awkward feeling of being a duck out of water, outside the reassurance of familiar people who love, accept and understand us, where our differences from those around us are amplified. Of course, to follow Jesus is to experience this from time to time. In today's reading, the apostle Paul is telling us something counterintuitive. Despite what we may feel, we are "fellow citizen[s] with the holy ones" who have gone before. That is encouraging indeed, particularly when we feel as though we are sojourning as an alien or stranger.

Our commitments to the teachings of the Church put us at odds with the dominant culture in so many ways, and lately, so much moreso. Yet somehow, it is of great comfort to know that we share the company of the saints who have gone before, many of whom have given their very lives for the privilege of being a follower of Jesus. Each year at Easter, we sing the litany of saints in the vigil mass. I look forward to this part of the mass especially, as I cannot sing this liturgy without tears. The sense of continuity with all who have gone before, the cloud of witnesses who are all around us and cheering us on in faith and good deeds, seems to permeate my entire being. It reminds me that I belong to something bigger than myself, bigger even than all of my hopes and dreams. As a convert to Catholicism, this sense of something bigger than anything I had encountered before filled me with a sense of awe. True truth, indeed. Or as a friend of mine who converted before me once said, "it is like falling into the ocean." Yes, but without fear, despite the uncertainty of the depths you might encounter.

Life as a citizen and member of the household means responsibilities. To what extent are we living up to the privilege conferred upon us? That is a worthy topic for meditation. In an era when rights mean so much, what about the duties that are conferred upon us? Are our actions reflecting favorably upon the commitments of our household? Yikes!

We need assurance here, too. The gospel for today names the disciples whom Jesus had chosen, warts and all. Oddly enough, this passage refers to "Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor." But didn't everyone else desert Jesus when it counted? Even Peter, the Rock, denied Jesus when confronted, leaving him in fear. It strikes me that the moniker of traitor could have applied to all of the members of this motley crew of disciples at points in their lives. But sadly, only Judas gave up on following our Lord by taking his own life. That is an act of despair, not an act of hope. May mercy be upon him, too. We need the gift of faith to follow through when times get tough. Can we find the hope and faith we need to continue what feels like sojourning as an alien? Let us ask our predecessors to pray for us, so that our Lord may keep us and to sustain us, taking comfort in the many signs that are left for us in this world, which bring to mind the truth that we are called into something greater, deeper, broader, wider, richer, and more important than any competing good. Thanks be to God.

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