

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Mar 24th 2015

Today is the 35th Anniversary of the Martyrdom of Archbishop Oscar Romero.

Jesus' confidence in his mission, almost bordering on combativeness, is showcased in today's Gospel according to John. He is clearly not happy with the Pharisees and their thick-headedness.

What jumped out at me, however were the verses, "...then you will realize that I AM, and that I do nothing on my own, but I say only what the Father taught me. The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone ...' Because he spoke this way, many came to believe in him."

These words of Jesus reminded me of the confidence exhibited by a group of people in the late 1940s and early 1950s, members of the Omaha DePorres Club and the subject of the book "Ahead of Their Time" by Matt Holland.

We are reading this book as part of a Lenten spirituality program at Creighton. The story, which is written by the son of one of the leaders of the group, begins on the Creighton campus in 1947. Seven students met with Father John Markoe, S.J., to discuss "the race problem" in the city of Omaha.

Fr. Markoe was a charismatic priest who was utterly convinced that the black citizens of Omaha were not being treated fairly. The students agreed, the club was named after Blessed Martin DePorres (who was known as the patron of interracial harmony and justice and was canonized in 1962) and their numbers grew as did their reputation and the good they did.

The courage of these Truman-era individuals was remarkable. They clearly were "ahead of their time." None of them had ever done anything like the protests, letter-writing campaigns, boycotts and other activities they carried out as they crossed racial barriers and broke social convention after social convention.

Like Jesus in today's Gospel, they were totally confident of the rightness of what they were doing. They were faithful, prayerful Christian people, mostly Catholics, who knew God was on their side. They would not be stopped.

At times a few of them were fearful, which was unlike Jesus, but most of them had a remarkable lack of fear. All of them showed unusual strength of conviction.

In reading the book, it is so clear that the Holy Spirit was at work because they were not merely joining a popular movement. Their determination and power came from deep within. It is obvious to the reader that they were “sent” by one who was with them and had not left them alone. And, because they spoke the way they did, “many came to believe” in the rightness of their message.

Let us pray today for that courage, that conviction, that confidence in God’s ability to use us for holy purposes.

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