

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Oct 19th 2015

Memorial of Saints John de Brébeuf and Isaac Jogues, Priests, and Companions, Martyrs

Blessed are the Poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

During my reflection and prayer based on the readings for today, I have a recurring sense of the immediate presence of God. The reminders throughout the readings of the physical presence of Jesus, and the promises connoted by his companionship with us, give us continuing hope. God has, through his mercy, come to set us free; to save us from enemies; to free us to worship Him without fear. We, like Abraham, do not doubt God's promise.

We experience, through the Responsorial Psalm, a list that reads like a litany: He has come to set us free; to save us from our enemies; to save us from the hands of those who hate us; to show mercy; to free us from our enemies; to free us to worship Him without fear.

Consider the lives of the martyrs memorialized today in the context of these words. I especially focus on the amazing and deep faith of Father Isaac Jogues. He had, through the grace and guidance of God, left France and journeyed to "New France" to bring the gospel and, hopefully, a better life to the indigenous people. He learned the language of the native people, their customs, and preached. Many were won over by his dedication and his energy. He clearly believed that his vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience would help him to live and preach the word of God. Although Isaac had many successes, he was eventually captured by enemies, enslaved, and tortured. His hands were so mutilated through burning, biting, and cutting his fingers, that he could no longer say Mass. He was freed after a Dutch trader was able to ransom him, and he returned to France. The Pope gave him a dispensation from the rule that the Eucharist could only be held in the right hand between the index finger and thumb; Isaac again could celebrate the Mass.

Isaac returned to "New France" after only a short stay in his native country. Even though his once strong hands that had built shelters, helped to propel canoes up rivers, and marked new converts with the sign of the cross, they were now nearly useless, he felt that he could be of use in the wilderness. He was again captured. He was tortured, and dismembered. His life and his actions were the living gospel. He steadfastly believed in "the one who raised Jesus, our Lord, from the dead; our Lord who died for our transgressions." Fr. Jogues clearly believed in the words of Jesus in Luke's gospel for today. "One's life does not consist of possessions", but rather, that one's riches are "actions that matter to God." When Isaac's life was demanded of him, he had no significant possessions; he only had the knowledge that his actions were for the greater glory of God.

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