

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, May 2nd 2016

“I have told you this so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you.”

Today’s Gospel (Jn 15:28 – 16:4) occurs in Our Lord’s address to the Apostles at the Last Supper:

“When the Advocate comes whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will testify to me. And you also testify, because you have been with me from the beginning I have told you this so that you may not fall away. They will expel you from the synagogues; in fact, the hour is coming when everyone who kills you will think he is offering worship to God. They will do this because they have not known either the Father or me. I have told you this so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you.”

Preparing this reflection on the above passage, I realized how striking it is that what Our Lord says to the Apostles has as much to do with today’s world as it does to the Apostles and to the many persecuted in the earliest Christian communities. Pope Francis reinforced my thought when he referenced today’s Gospel in a homily I recently read, addressing the killing of 21 Coptic Christians at the hands of ISIS militants in Libya that took place earlier this year. "I called to mind these faithful, who were slaughtered on the beach because they are Christians. Because of the strength given them by the Holy Spirit . . . they died with the name of Jesus on their lips. This is the power of the Spirit. Witness. Martyrdom is the supreme witness."

After reading the Pope’s remarks, I “googled” these words: terrorism & Christianity. Here are just three of the items appearing on my screen:

A suicide blast in eastern Pakistan city of Lahore killed at least 65 people and injured over 300 as they were celebrating Easter on Sunday in a local park. A splinter group of the Taliban claimed responsibility, saying they’d intentionally targeted Christians.

An Italian study determined that 105,000 Christians are martyred for their faith annually— in essence, a Christian dies every 5 minutes, primarily in the Middle East.

Last summer thousands of Christians in Mosul and the Ninevah Plain in Iraq, including nearly 40,000 Syriac Catholics, were driven out by ISIS militants. The militants have posted multiple videos of beheadings.

It is incumbent upon us to heed Christ’s words in today’s Gospel. How is this so? For at least these two reasons: (1) By reason of the Mystical Body of Christ, we are in solidarity with Him – He lives, moves, and has His being in us, and (2) For the same reason, we are in solidarity with all those Martyrs of our own times who are persecuted for their Christian Faith. These two facts, revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in scripture and in the traditions of our earliest Christian communities, call us to a practical kind of compassion for our persecuted Church. Here are a few things which occur to me that one might do to awaken such compassion.

Take seriously the cry from the persecuted Church: “Pray for us!” Pray personally and together with others. It may seem far fetched to think we can assuage the pain and suffering of those persecuted or to

effect a change of heart in those perpetrating the persecution, but for God, nothing is impossible.

Through trusted non-profit organizations like Catholic Charities, the Jesuit Refugee Service, and Christian Freedom International, provide tangible assistance (monetary and material donations) to the hundreds of thousands of Christians and other religious minorities who have been forced to leave their homelands to flee terrorist organizations.

Take part in rallies and speak in Parishes to bring greater awareness and attention to the plight of Christians being persecuted in their homelands.

Search out Christian refugee families and supply them with mattresses, hygiene kits, and food after their flight from countries where terrorists are in power.

Host gatherings and retreats for persecuted Christians affected by terrorism.

Subsidize and otherwise encourage businesses who can provide living expenses, homes, and jobs for persecuted Christian refugees.

Christ crucified, Christ the Healer, Christ Crucified: Help us find effective ways to help our brothers and sisters in our persecuted Church and ways to deal with those who perpetrate the persecution. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Send us your Holy Spirit.

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