

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Apr 28th 2017

In the first reading, the apostles are in some trouble for proclaiming the good news. The Sanhedrin want to shut this down: Stop them from talking about Jesus, stop the whole production. But a Pharisee tells a story about some other prophets who were thought to be important, but when they died the movement died with them. Without the prophet there was nothing left. The followers disappeared when there was no one left to follow. If there's nothing to this, he said, it should die down like the others. The movement will disappear of its own accord like the others did, if Jesus was like the others. But if there really is something to this, if Jesus really is God, then nothing on earth can stop it. Not the Sanhedrin. Not torturing and killing the followers. No laws or penalties can stop the force of God. If this is really real, then it will surely continue no matter what they try to do to stop it, and they will be fighting against God himself. The logical thing to do is to wait it out and see what happens. If there's nothing to it, it will die out on its own. If there's something to it, they should not be on the wrong side.

The false messiahs didn't survive. They had modest followings, but their movements couldn't continue without them because there was no substance. The gospel shows the miracle of the loaves and the fishes. Thousands of people followed Jesus to the Sea of Galilee because they saw him performing signs and healing the sick. The false prophets had a few hundred followers but here are thousands wanting to see Jesus and hear what he has to say. And at dinner time, Jesus asks where they can get food for everyone. This is an impossible task. There are thousands of people there, whole families all hungry. Even if there was some way to procure that much food, who could afford it? Philip says it would be two hundred days' wages to buy enough food for everyone there. A boy has some bread and a couple fish, barely enough for one person's meal, not for the thousands of hungry people there. But Jesus says, let's share. And they start passing out food. And all the people there eat as much as they want. Jesus tells them to collect the leftovers so they don't go to waste, and there are twelve baskets of food left from the one paltry meal. This is the real thing. This is a true miracle – and a generous one, feeding the hungry. The people recognize the miracle of it as well. They say, “This is the true Prophet.”

The false prophets had no real backing. They were not God. Their ministries died with them. No one today has heard of Theudas. Everyone has heard of Jesus. The signs and miracles were real and palpable. This is the real thing. And despite the attempts from the Sanhedrin and others from the time of the crucifixion through today to destroy the movement, it's still going strong. Nothing can stop it. The false prophets are less than footnotes in history. There was nothing to them, and their stories died out. But Jesus performed real miracles and really rose from the dead. Two thousand years later we continue to tell his story and live his words. There is something to this, and it won't die, and we should not be on the wrong side.

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