

May 15, 2020 – Saturday of the 5th Week of Easter



**“If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too”
Acts 16:1-10 John 15:18-21**

In these past days, weeks, and even months, our societies and communities have been heavily battered and affected by the terrible effects of the coronavirus pandemic, as well as its various complications and impacts on the global, national and regional economies, on our various livelihoods and aspects of life. There are people losing their hope and even sanity in the midst of these difficult troubles and times, but this is exactly where we can be those beacons of hope for everyone. Like their master, the Apostles would face persecution for upholding their faith in Christ and the gospel values. This is the price of discipleship. This is true especially in our times when secularism is attacking Christianity and rewriting the acceptable norms for society. What do we do in the face of resistance to the gospel and opposition?

During China's Boxer Rebellion of 1900, insurgents captured a mission station, blocked all the gates but one, and in front of that one gate placed a cross flat on the ground. Then the word was passed to those inside that any who trampled the cross underfoot would be permitted their freedom and life, but that any refusing would be shot. Terribly frightened, the first seven students trampled the cross under their feet and were allowed to go free. But the eighth student, a young girl, refused to commit the sacrilegious act. Kneeling beside the cross in prayer for strength, she arose and moved carefully around the cross, and went out to face the firing squad. Strengthened by her example, every one of the remaining ninety-two students followed her to the firing squad. The example of the one brave and faithful child inspired others to also be bold in their defense of the faith. These children, strong and courageous, laid down their lives, to be obedient to their faith. Fear of death could not strangle their faith! Fear of persecution could not suppress their conviction! (from *Today in the Word*, February 1989, p. 17).

Paul often mentions the problems and conflicts he had to meet when going about his apostolic work. We are likely to have met our own share of difficulties in life, not least the recent experience of anxiety and confinement during the Covid-19 virus emergency.

The Gospel of the Day is a mighty invitation by Jesus to remain steadfast and bold even in the face of persecutions in defense for our faith in Him. And this steadfastness is in imitation of Jesus, our Master, who Himself underwent a miserable series of pain, persecution, suffering, and humiliation, and yet remain totally faithful to His Mission.

Jesus says, "If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first... If they persecuted me, they will persecute you" (Jn 15: 18, 20b). The Lord is very clear in His teaching and preaching: Friendship with Jesus would mean hostility from the world. Non-compromise with Jesus' teaching would result in antagonism from the world. Our Lord Himself had to undergo this pain of rejection, persecution, and opposition throughout His life. The Lord alerts His disciples that the same will be true in their lives too if they too chose to remain faithful to their vocation. As a follower of the Lord, we too need to be aware that sufferings and hardships on being Christian are sure to come our way.

What is our attitude and disposition to these trials that we face because of our faith in Christ? Do we be bold and courageous even when we are to face isolation or seclusion due to standing firm in our values and principles in the Lord? Do we live our lives in joy and calmness even when we have to face misunderstandings and become an object of laughter, or called as "old-traditionalist" as a result of being staunch in following the Gospel values? The world constantly ensnares us with temptations to abandon the Cross. The evil one very often traps us with hardships to dilute our faith in the Lord

Are we going to yield into such temptations and enticements Or are we prepared to face any amount of difficulty, to uphold our faith in the Lord? Are we going to stamp the Cross of Christ and Faith in Him Or are we bold and courageous to sustain our witnessing to Jesus in the world?

Practical Suggestion:

We must learn from Paul in the way he dealt with resistance and opposition. Instead of fighting them, as in opposing those who champion the values of superficial love and culture of death, we should promote the culture of life and the culture of authentic love in family life. Instead of accentuating our disagreement and end up battling with our opponents, it would be better for us to light the candle and shine for the world to see

what we do and believe in. It is the same for this Covid-19 Pandemic. Instead of seeing it as an obstacle to our faith because we do not have the traditional means to encounter God, then we must take this occasion as a period for purification, a better appreciation of our faith and the liturgy. We can find new ways to grow in our faith and spiritual life. We must learn to adapt creatively to new challenges and obstacles. This Covid-19 pandemic has forced us to think of a parish without boundaries, a new way of formation, and evangelization.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, may I not only imitate You in Your suffering, but also in Your willing embrace of it. I ask the Holy Spirit for the courage of my Christian convictions to believe and practice what You taught and what You continue to teach through the Church.

Jesus, I trust in You.