

The Test for believers: Faithfulness among the Unbelieves

Adopted from 'Catholic Exponent'

It's that time of year again. Graduation and their accompanying commencement addresses abound. Carefully chosen speakers offer sound (but quickly forgotten) advice to anxious students on the threshold of a new beginning.

This practice of addressing a few memorable words of advice to friends and associates is well known to students of the Bible. When Moses was about to leave his faithful followers in Israel, he prepared them for his absence by delivering a few words of advice and a prayer (Dt 32-33).

The most famous farewell speech which reveals an elusive, yet memorable truth, is the 'Final Discourse' of Jesus recorded in St. John's Gospel. A section of the prayer which concludes Jesus' discourse forms today's Gospel reading.

This passage, originally delivered on the night before Jesus' death, is placed in the liturgy on the Sunday before Pentecost. The liturgy does this in order to alert us to the coming of the Holy Spirit and to urge us to recreate within ourselves the same spirit of watchfulness and prayer which marked the days prior to the first Pentecost.

In this Gospel, then, Jesus states that his 'hour has come.' Jesus is prepared to return to the Father. His work on earth is nearing completion. By his words and deeds, Jesus had revealed that he is truly the Son of God, the 'gift' of the Father. He is the 'truth' which the disciplines will come to appreciate fully only after he is glorified at the Father's side.

Because Jesus is one with the Father, all that belongs to Jesus actually belongs to the Father. In John's Gospel Jesus refers to the disciples as 'his own,' those who belong to him and cling to him in faith. He is the 'way, the truth and the life.' This 'word,' 'this truth,' is the message the disciples are to impart to others once Jesus has departed from them.

John's Gospel repeatedly stresses the unity between suffering and glorification. Just as Good Friday cannot be understood without constant attention to Easter so the joy and glory of the Easter season cannot be fully appreciated without averting to the fact that a follower of Jesus must walk in trial and suffering as well.

The scripture scholar, Ernst Kasemann, refers to this Final Discourse as the 'last will and testament' of Jesus. The 'hour' of Jesus has finally arrived. It is an hour of death coupled with an hour of triumph, glory and exultation. At Cana in Galilee Jesus

protested that his hour had not yet come; now it is upon him. Through his cross Jesus calls all people to the Father. Jesus prays for those whom the Father has given him, that while still in the world, they may not become part of the world.

The trial for you and me as believers is to remain faithful to the word of God while living among unbelievers. Part of our suffering is the sacrifice we are required to make to maintain our Christian ideals in a society which scoffs at the difficult teaching of the Church in areas such as sexual morality, abortion, the challenges of world peace and economic justice.

Today's reading from first Peter reiterates the truth that suffering is part of the life of a believer: 'Happy are you when you are insulted for the sake of Christ, for then God's Spirit in its glory has come to rest on you. If anyone suffers for being a Christian, that person ought not be ashamed but rather glorify God in virtue of that name.'

Like the Apostles in today's readings from Acts, we are the Church gathered in the upper room with Jesus for the Last Supper. We, too, anticipate the renewal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, the new Pentecost, the coming of the Paraclete.

With the memorable words of Jesus' final discourse burning in our hearts, we gather in prayer that the Holy Spirit will preserve us in truth; we also ask him to keep us faithful to the commandments and the word of God despite the pressures to compromise and change our Christian values.

'Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful. And kindle in them the fire of your love.'

'Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you will renew the face of the earth.'

Let us pray.

'Lord, by the light of the Holy Spirit you have taught the hearts of your faithful. The same Spirit help us to relish what is right and always rejoice in your consolation. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.'

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READINGS OF THE WEEK

Acts 1:12-14 1 Peter 4:13-16 John 17:1-11

June 1, 2014

靈 修 生 活

十 字 架 上 的 耶 穌

盧 鋼 錯

十字架上的耶穌令人肅然起敬的不在於祂受苦的形象，而在於祂死亡背後的意義。十字架上的耶穌有神情痛苦的、悲哀的、茫然的、無助的、憐憫的，總帶點非人間性，祂的生與死與世俗的定義有迥異之處。不論教徒或非教徒，在教堂內透過彩色玻璃直接或折射的光看釘在十字架上的耶穌，超凡入聖的感受一定油然而生。

中世紀很多名畫都與宗教有關，十五世紀初葉的格魯斯德的《耶穌上十字架》和稍後繪成的《小型耶穌上十字架》是很著名的畫作。《耶穌上十字架》中的耶穌皮膚因受鞭笞折磨而腫脹破裂，面部表情痛苦，十字架底部旁邊有一小羊，小羊頭部向上，望著耶穌，小羊旁有一小小的十字架。耶穌是痛苦的，但祂對世人充滿了愛，對小羊充滿期望，小小的十字架是訓勉：人生有更多的十字架。《小型耶穌上十字架》繪於一五二零年，整幅畫主調陰暗，背後是無盡的黑漆和綿互的山脈，微弱的光芒顯示真理所在。舊約常提及「受苦的僕人」、「非以役人，乃為人役」，是人子對我們的啟示。委拉斯費茲於一六三一年繪成的《十字架上的耶穌》，耶穌樣子異常哀戚，悲傷中洋溢人性的莊嚴，莊嚴中包含寬恕與憐惜，憐惜人類的愚昧。

十字架上耶穌的面容不論痛苦或安詳，也足以令人肅然、穆然，祂那種求仁得仁的從容，是不屬於塵世的。旅行歐洲時，看過一個很特別的十字架上的耶穌像，祂面上沒有悲哀，沒有失望，沒有痛楚，沒有愛情，沒有無奈，只有木然的表情，只有一臉的茫然。從沒見過一個十字架上的耶穌是這個樣子的，心裡有點震慄。是人類的冥頑使耶穌悲哀，悲哀得沒有悲哀？是人類的自私使耶穌失望，失望得不再失望？是人類的殘酷使耶穌痛楚，痛楚麻木得不再痛楚？是人類的寡情使耶穌不相信愛情，愛情不再是愛情？是人類的貪婪使耶穌無奈，無奈之餘再添無奈？耶穌的敵人不是魔鬼，不是法利塞人，不是出賣祂的猶達斯，是人類，是祂的羊，是祂用生命和鮮血去拯救的羊群，是忘恩負義的人。這世上已愈來愈少人懂得恩和義了。

德國教堂十字架上的耶穌容貌揮之不去，忽然想起一六一二年魯本斯的《卸下聖體》，哀悼者把耶穌從十字架卸下，身體的重量把十字架墜得傾斜，幾乎沒法承受，誰承受得這偉大的愛情？所有光線都集中耶穌身上，所有畫面的人都哀傷得既絕望又失落。

哀傷和失落有甚麼用？到曠野狂號懺悔吧，用五大洋的海水洗去罪惡吧！

摘自「公教報」

本 週 讀 經

二零一四年六月一日

宗 1:12-14; 伯前 4:13-16; 若 17:1-11