

Homily083020

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, LORD?

We who gather here today believe in Jesus Christ. We are his followers, called Christians because we believe Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God; called Catholic because from the earliest years of our faith it was clear that the message of Jesus was for everyone. The word catholic comes from the Greek words: *kata*—with respect to; and *holos*—the whole. *Kat'holos* means with respect to the whole, the entirety. There are a variety of ways to be Christian—in the Anglican tradition or the Presbyterian tradition or the Orthodox tradition and so on. We are Catholics. We believe that Jesus' message is for everyone and it is our task to live the way he proposed and to spread it abroad. It is not just for me or for us but rather for all. He has come to reveal this truth to us and to hand it on to us and through us to the world.

And right there is the rub. The message proclaimed by Jesus of Nazareth whom we believe to be the Son of God incarnate is by no means an easy message. But, we think in our moments of solitude, shouldn't his way be easier than it is? Well, one would tend to think so. But then, there is this reality we call sin. It is very clear. There is still real evil in this world. Willfulness. Arrogance. Selfishness. Bitterness. Anger. Greed. Lust. Lies. These things are always very close by. His message has to make its way in a sinful world among sinners.

My friends, we all know that there is a myriad of ways of looking at life. The godly way is just one of them. And not always the most popular or best understood. What do people focus on? Control. Power. Success. Wealth. Accomplishments. Status. In other words: how much I have; how much I have done; how much reward and recognition will I receive? These are not at all uncommon ways of thinking. And we apply similar criteria to our world, especially our own families, our local communities and the country we live in.

But Jesus presents a different way of looking at life. What is that? In his own words he says: Deny yourself. Carry your cross. Follow me (accept my leadership and live my way). Put God first not yourself, not your country, not even your loved ones. Embrace the times and places when the cross enters your life. Carry it. Carry it like Jesus carried his cross. Why? Because the cross is what his message looks like when it encounters the evil in this world. Embrace humility in your life and in the lives of those you love. It is only after carrying the injustice of the cross that resurrection comes. In other words, only then that love triumphs.

That is the message of Jesus. What was the reaction to that message? Some were attracted to it. Some ridiculed it. Others took one look and looked away, ignoring his message. Still others sought to challenge him on his message even Simon Peter did in the story from today's gospel. Some rejected Jesus' message. Some embraced it wholeheartedly and lived it fully. Some sought actively to silence him, to destroy him, to remove his voice from this world. For, they recognized the threat that his way of life presented to the powers that be.

I go into all of this because of all that is going on in our world and our country and in our community at this time. From the pandemic, to the racial tensions, to the elections that look so large before us. I sense the fear. I hear the anger. Much is heightened in intensity. People are even driving faster for some reason. So with all of this does God have something to say to us today?

Well, Yes. God always speaks. From Jeremiah the Prophet. He sought to speak the truth and was mocked for it. He was given the truth to speak to his people and no one listened. And what he predicted would happen, happened. And would not have happened if his message had been accepted. Our Lord uses Jeremiah to speak to us.

Then there is Saint Paul in his long letter to the Church at Rome, the same Church that is the Roman Catholic Church in which we are members. Simply put Paul says: Do not conform yourself to this age. Each age will espouse a way of life. There will be some good and some bad. The way of Jesus, though, is only good. Do not conform yourselves to anything or anyone more than the Lord. No business. No political party. No worldly way of life. God first. Deny self. Embrace the cross in humility. It's hard. It is really difficult. It can only happen by the grace of Jesus Christ. My friends, there is no cheap grace in Christ. It is costly. But it is thoroughly worthwhile.

Jesus tells his disciples what they can expect if they follow him. Us too. We want more. We want different. We are told simply what we are to do. Deny yourself. (Teach your children that truth). Carry your cross as unfair and as unjust as it is, as mine was unfair and unjust too. Surrender to God. Be humble. Why does Jesus bid us to live this way? The psalmist gives us the answer: My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God. At root that thirst is what animates all of us. It will only be quenched by the grace of Jesus Christ.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.