

January 19, 2020

Is 49:3,5-6; 1 Cor 1:1-3; Jn 1:29-34

When I was talking to friends before going on my my vacation, I had one conversation that set me on a mission. I was going for the first time on a cruise, and some friends were telling me that once when they went on a cruise they were upset that they couldn't get to Mass since they were told there was no priest on the ship. Well knowing we would be at sea on Sunday, when I booked my spot I offered to say Mass on the ship for anyone who wanted to come. I packed two tupperware containers of hosts and other needed things in my suitcase (I didn't bring wine figuring there would be no problem finding any kind of alcohol that was needed on a cruise ship). Well, when I got on board I found that not only had the Chapel of the ship been converted into a game room, but they refused to offer any of the other rooms or venues on the ship to hold Mass (although other groups were allowed to voluntarily meet for those who wanted to go). I was told that they couldn't allow it since there were people there of other faiths on the ship. So I wondered why they offered volleyball since there were people who were in wheelchairs and could not play, or why they offered movies and shows that not everyone wanted to watch. For everything else, you were told where it was going on and you could go if you wanted, or not - your choice. Why would religious services not have the same option as morning trivia in the Schooner Bar?

It made me reflect on the great change that is happening in our society. The increased secularization that has somehow successfully marginalized religion and convinced people there is a rule against religious activities if anyone at all might disagree. These people were convinced that they would be doing something wrong in allowing a religious service, but no problem with a group meeting to discuss a book, or watch a show, or even have a private party for a family member celebrating a birthday. Some of us may also have bought the false rhetoric that to speak of religion in public is somehow a violation of "church and state" - it is *not* - in fact the principle of the "Separation of Church and State" has much more to do with preventing the government from controlling or suppressing religion. The biggest problem I see is when we as Christians follow the secular rhetoric and believe that we are not supposed to openly speak about or express our religion - rather than this rhetoric, we should follow the teaching of Jesus and the example of our ancestors in the faith.

Being a Christian is not just a private affair. This is what others tell you, but not what is at the heart of our religion. We are called to be disciples - followers and students of Jesus - and are called to

spread his message. We heard in the first reading: *The LORD said to me: You are my servant ... through whom I show my glory ... I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.* We are told that it is some kind of rule that you have to keep your religion and beliefs to yourself - that religion and faith are just built out of personal beliefs. But, really religion is a group venture and we are called as a group to be a light to the nations. What we have to remember is that the truths of faith are not just some personal set of beliefs to pick from if they strike your fancy or make you feel good - we believe that they are objective truths. The Apostles and other early Christians believed this and continued to preach Jesus when they were hauled before the authorities and told to stop.

Too often we buy the lie of the secular culture that our faith is just one out of many beliefs you can pick or choose from as you please. But really, it is a set of truths, and like any other truths they don't always fit our tastes - they just are what they are. Through Baptism we have been transformed, as we heard in the second reading: *to you who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, [are] called to be holy.* We have been called, and are in fact privileged to be able to participate in the life of Jesus Christ. There are truths about this life and about reality that simply are so. The beauty of our Catholic faith is that it preserves these great truths which are more vital than the world would have us believe - and doesn't just try to fit everyone's personal tastes (which is impossible anyway). We heard today in the Gospel of John giving witness to the coming of Jesus in his public ministry, he says: *Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. ... Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God.* The way Jesus came didn't fit John's personal tastes, but Jesus told him just to go with it and have faith. It is in the truth of this Son of God that we are called to believe in faith, it is the truth of the revelation of God that we are called to cling to (even if it is doubted by a culture that has at many times in history been hostile to the truth of God) - it is also a truth that is perfectly consistent with science and reason.

But all this can be difficult. So much of the aspects of faith are difficult to understand, so many voices can get us confused, so much misinformation is out there, so many people roll their eyes at these things. But people rolled their eyes once at the idea that the world was round, people rolled their eyes at the idea that little unseen creatures (we now call them bacteria) float through the air and invade you to make you sick, and people once laughed at the idea that we could build a machine that would allow humans to fly in the air. Pay more attention to the truths God has revealed to us and less on the eye rolling and laughing. Every great truth was not believed - and even today this is true. Let us together hold to the truths of God, believe these truths in faith, and together be a light to the nations!