

Homily for Monday of the second week of Easter

Reflections based on the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, 4:23-31

One might have thought that after Our Lord's shameful death on the cross, his faithful disciples would no longer be subjected to harassment and acts of violence. Not so. In truth, the persecution only intensified. The earthly kings and rulers, represented by Herod and Pilate, and the religious authorities, represented by the Sadducees, were unrelenting in their zeal to stifle the voices of the Christian leaders, in particular Peter and John. Why the animus toward the early Christian Church? The answer is Christ's Resurrection from the dead. They proclaimed the Good News of Easter.

In today's reading, the believers pray not for an end to persecution, which was expected, but for courage in the face of stiff opposition.

"And now, Lord, take note of their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with all boldness..." (Acts 4:29).

They ask God to give them the strength they need to continue to proclaim the word boldly and not be intimidated by their more powerful adversaries. Their prayers were heard. "As they prayed, the place where they were gathered shook, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31)

In his Pulitzer Prize winning study of grace under pressure, "Profiles in Courage", the late John Fitzgerald Kennedy, argued that the opportunities to be courageous are presented to all of us. He writes, "To be courageous requires no exceptional qualifications, no magic formula, no special combination of time, place and circumstance".

The secular media typically singles out the most heroic acts of courage. One might recall the pilot who set his plane down on the Hudson River, sparing the lives of all his passengers. But quiet acts of courage are just as praiseworthy; speaking on behalf of the unborn child, poor migrants, the disabled and those who suffer from addictions.

One of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit is fortitude. It is the virtue that enables us to face firmly the difficulties and dangers that stand in the way of duty and goodness. More than ever, we need this gift in our secular culture today.

Come, Holy Spirit. Guide, enlighten and strengthen us!