

January 31, 2021 The Eternal Word Homily: One of the most distinguished teachers in the history of Israel is Rabbi Hananiah Ben Teradion, who lived in the Second Century of the Christian era. A man of exceptional courage and tenacity, he suffered a martyr's death for openly defying Roman authorities. The legend of his martyrdom is worth telling.

He was arrested by Roman soldiers and sentenced to die at the stake for teaching the Torah in public. To make their point the soldiers wrapped the holy man in scrolls. The sacred parchments were then set on fire.

His students watched him helplessly. As he endured agony, his flesh singed with fire, suddenly, one of his students turned to him and said, "What do you see? Tell us Rabbi, what do you see now?"

Before losing consciousness, he answered: "The scrolls are burning, but the letters are stronger than the fire. They are indestructible... they are flying up to heaven, they are returning to heaven."

As Elie Weisel has written, "One can die for truth but truth never dies". Truth is eternal and can never be extinguished.

Today's first reading is from the Book of Deuteronomy (Deut, 18: 15-20), the last book of the Torah and one that follows the Book of Numbers in the Old Testament. Sadly, it is a book largely unknown to most Catholics. The writings consist of Moses' last words as Israel is about to enter the Promised Land. Many scholars consider it his last will and testament.

Within Israel there was no greater authority than Moses. He is considered the greatest of the prophets. He heard the voice of God in the burning bush; he was given the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, and he talked to God as one talks to an intimate friend.

God assures Moses that he will send one final prophet. Moses looked ahead to the one of whom God says, "I will put my words into his mouth. The Lord will raise him up. One needs to listen to what he says." (Deut. 18: 18-19) There has never been one like Moses until the coming of Jesus Christ.

In today's gospel we learn that those who gathered in the synagogue and heard Christ speak "were astonished at his teaching" (Mk. 1:22) as though he were God Himself. Of this prophet foretold by Moses, we hear words of warning: "Whoever will not listen to my word which he speaks in my name I myself will make him answer for it". (Deut. 18:19)

Several months ago, in the city of Portland, Oregon, a mass demonstration was held. During the protest there was on display the burning of the bible. It was a symbolic gesture meant to signal the protestors disdain of Western Civilization, the freedom of religion, and most significantly, the baleful influence of Christianity on the citizens of America.

What they found most offensive was the revealed Word of God. So they insisted that the Divine Word must be silenced.

Time and again, efforts have been made to stifle the influence of Christianity and harass people of faith, either Jewish or Christian. In 1933, the year Hitler came to power, the Nazis publicly burned the Hebrew bible. During the French revolution bibles and other sacred works were set afire and were incinerated. Today, the voices of Christians are censored by the corporate main stream media and the so-called tech industries. If not told to tone down their message, Christian speakers, are often silenced, and even subjected to vicious personal attacks.

In other parts of the world, churches are torched, Christians are kidnapped and tortured, and the news media willfully and malevolently refuse to cover the stories since these outrages do not fit in with their secular narrative.

Again, the Word of God offends many of the world's elites.

Nevertheless, we can be of good cheer. The truths revealed by Moses and Our Lord, Jesus Christ, can never be erased!

"One can die for truth but truth never dies."

Amen!