

**April 25, 2021 A Profile In Courage Homily:** One of the books on the required reading list in my days as a junior high school student (1966-68) was “Profiles in Courage”, a work of non-fiction written by one of our nation’s former presidents, John Fitzgerald Kennedy. The Book was published in 1956, and enjoyed great popularity with the reading public. After his election to the presidency in 1960, it became even more popular. It earned Kennedy the prestigious Pulitzer Prize.

The book features short biographies describing acts of bravery and integrity by eight United States Senators, including such famous figures as John Quincy Adams, Robert Taft and Daniel Webster. Undeterred by intense opposition and generally negative publicity, they each distinguished themselves by their courage in adversity.

When we listen to Saint Peter’s sermon in today’s first reading and remember to whom it was spoken, we recognize one of the world’s great demonstrations of courage... Peter, an uneducated fisherman with no political connections, speaks boldly, and without fear before members of the religious establishment. “Observing the boldness of Peter and John and perceiving them to be uneducated, ordinary men, they were amazed, and they recognized them as companions of Jesus.” (Acts. 4:13)

Here’s the background of the reading:

Saints Peter and John are arrested for preaching the Resurrection of Jesus. They are then taken into custody and imprisoned overnight. The following day they are brought before the Sanhedrin, the supreme ruling body of the Jews, consisting of seventy-one members. This is the same court that had tried Our Lord on the eve of his death.

Peter, who on the night of the Last Supper and Jesus’ arrest cowered in fear in the presence of a servant girl, shows remarkable supernatural courage. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that Peter witnesses to the risen Christ. The Holy Spirit is the Church’s power source. Indeed, in today’s reading from the fourth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles we hear the words, “Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit....” (Acts. 4:8)

Saint Peter is a profile in courage!

In Luke’s gospel, Jesus says to his disciples, “When they take you before synagogues and before rulers and authorities, do not worry about how or what your defense will be or what you are to say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that moment what you should say”. (Lk. 12:11)

In 1973, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, one of the truly great figures of the last century, was invited to give the commencement address at Harvard University graduation exercises. The author of critically acclaimed books and a recent winner of the Nobel Prize was also the survivor of years spent in a Soviet prison camp in Siberia. Solzhenitsyn was a keen observer of contemporary life, and he makes some observations, which left many in the audience uncomfortable, if not furious. He said:

“A decline in courage is particularly noticeable among the ruling groups and the intellectual elite, causing an impression of loss of courage by the entire society... Should one point out that from ancient times declining courage has been considered the beginning of the end”.

As baptized Catholics, we have a sacred duty to confess the faith we profess. Silence is scandalous, and is an offense to God. Religious faith is not a private matter. Today, in countries such as China, Christians are in prison for their defense of the faith. Emboldened by the presence of the Spirit, they fearlessly proclaim the truths of the faith.

It seems that there is a lack of courage today in many parts of the world, especially by our shepherds. Confronting the manifest evils of our time is no easy task.

May the Holy Spirit, our source of strength and wisdom, embolden us to speak openly and courageously of the Good Shepherd, who triumphed over death, and who bestowed on each of us his Spirit, enabling us to be his witnesses to the world.

Amen!