

Homily for 25th Sunday b cycle September 19, 2021

On a late November day in November of 1963, famed civil rights activist Rev. Martin Luther King and his wife, Coretta Scott King, were watching events unfold in real time on television following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. As the bier carrying the casket of the late president was being transported to the cathedral Capitol rotunda, Doctor King turned to his wife and said, "This is going to happen to me also. I don't think I will live to see my fortieth birthday"

He was right.

Only five years later, at the age of thirty-nine, he was murdered by an assassin. How was he able to predict his own premature death? The civil rights leader had already received a number of menacing death threats from racists and had also been relentlessly persecuted for his activism. As one familiar with salvation history, he undoubtedly was aware that the just man often provoked the anger and envy of his adversaries, the wicked. And, as a minister of the gospel, King knew well that the Just man par excellence is Jesus Christ, who was subjected to violence and cruelty and because of his faithful witness, "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried".

Today's first reading from the Old Testament Book of Wisdom, prepares us for the second prediction of Christ's passion. "The Son of Man is to be handed over to men, and they will kill him, and three days after his death, the Son of Man will rise" (Mk. 9:31). Jesus accurately predicted he would be tortured and killed.

What is the explanation for Our Lord's prophecy? The answer may be found in our reading from Wisdom: "The wicked say: 'Let us beset the just man, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against all our doings (Wis.2:12)". The just provokes the anger and envy of his enemies. He must be silenced!

As we read in John's gospel, "Everyone who does evil hates the light" (Jn.:3:20)

"For if the just man be the son of God, God will defend him and deliver him from the hand of his foes" (Wis. 2:18), writes the author of the Book of wisdom.

Remarkably in Saint Matthew's gospel the taunts of the chief priests, scribes and elders of the people as Jesus was hanging on the cross are strikingly reminiscent of the words from the Book of Wisdom: "For if he is God's Son, he will help him and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries".

Today's Old Testament reading surely applies to countless men and women over the course of twenty centuries who were persecuted, tortured and put to death for their faithful witness. The wicked would not leave them alone. Failed attempts were made to break their spirits. They refused to be silenced.

In the early 1990's a small group of Trappist monks refused to abandon their monastery in Algeria. They had earlier been forewarned that if they failed to leave they would suffer the consequences. Out of love for the Algerian people, mostly of the Moslem faith, they chose to stay put.

They were brutally murdered by Moslem fundamentalists.

One monk, a Fr. Christien, expected to die at the hands of the extremists. He was under no illusion that his life would be spared and he awaited his death with fear and trembling. In his diary, he prayed to God that he not die with hatred in his heart. In advance, he forgave his executioners.

Today, Christian voices have been silenced. Because the Church defends traditional marriage, the life of the innocent unborn child and is opposed to assisted suicide, she is often subjected to a barrage of criticisms and personal attacks from many quarters, in particular the big tech industry and corporate media. Often, A Christian who simply respects the

natural law tradition and witnesses to moral truths dating back to the earliest days of the Church, is considered to be more sinister than the rapist, child molester, and mass murderer.

Pathetic!

Nearly four centuries before the birth of Christ, the Greek philosopher, Plato, a disciple of Socrates, wrote his best known classic, "The Republic", in which he makes the following statement:

"The just man will have to endure the lash, the rock, claws, a branding iron in his eyes and finally, after the extremity of suffering, he will be crucified"

Let not our enemies break our spirits.

Jesus, the just man, suffered violence because of his words.

Should we expect anything less?