

Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Feast of the Dedication. We know the Feast by its Hebrew name, Hanukkah: “an eight-day festival of lights held in December ... to celebrate the Maccabees’ rededication of the altar and reconsecration of the temple in 164 B.C., after their desecration by Antiochus IV Epiphanes” (Note Jn 10:22). History has a way of repeating itself, although with variations. Two centuries before the coming of the Messiah, a foreign ruler desecrated the temple. Now certain of the Jewish people who do not understand Jesus are ready to destroy the temple of his body. “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn 2:19).

They ask Jesus if he is the Messiah. He is and he tries to answer them clearly. His followers believe, but the cynics do not.

- Two chapters earlier, Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM” (8:53). God identified himself to Moses at the burning bush as “I AM.” So, Jesus’ language also identifies him as the LORD. This drew their ire and “they picked up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid and went out of the temple area” (8:54).
- He tells them again: “The Father and I are one” (10:30). They did not believe him before; they will not believe him now. “In their eyes, Jesus is just a man who claims to be God, and this constitutes blasphemy.”ⁱ

The Book of Leviticus prescribes: “Anyone who blasphemes God shall bear the penalty; whoever utters the name of the LORD in a curse shall be put to death. The whole community shall stone that person; alien and native-born alike must be put to death for uttering the LORD’s name in a curse” (Lv 24 10:15-16).

Jesus’ followers understand that he is the Messiah, he is the Good Shepherd, he is the Son of God and one with the Father. Many began to believe in Jesus, but a significant number did not. Jesus escapes harm during the Festival of Lights. We know that Jesus will return to Jerusalem in the spring for the Passover and the forces of darkness that fail to stop him now will plot to have him arrested and condemned to death.

Today, we live in a world that is often hostile to the faith. Charles Chaput, the retired Archbishop of Philadelphia, notes:

“In the past, religious faith always had a respected place in our nation’s life. Now it’s often treated with derision. For believers that’s new, very unpleasant, and a big temptation to cowardice. But if we claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, we can’t avoid the cross. If we want to keep our Catholic identity, it comes with a price tag in personal witness that can be painful.”ⁱⁱ

“Scripture reminds us that we need to speak the truth with love. Human persons *always* require our respect as children of God. But we still do need to speak the truth. Condemning people is wrong. Naming and resisting destructive behavior is right, and often necessary; and not to do so is a lack of courage. If conflict results from simply stating the truth, there’s no reason to apologize for or fear it.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Jesus faced conflict and paid the ultimate price for it. Rather than avoid the cross, he chose to carry it to Calvary. As we prepare to enter Holy Week, we should reflect on this great gift from Jesus and on how we can pick up our own cross to follow him. Jesus was willing to die for us. What are you willing to die for?

ⁱ Martin, Francis; Wright, William M. IV. *The Gospel of John* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture) (p. 198).

ⁱⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/news/in-new-interview-archbishop-chaput-opens-up-about-new-book-cultural-challenges-biden-administration

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.