

34th Wednesday II

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/112520.cfm>

REVELATION 15:1-4

I, John, saw in heaven another sign, great and awe-inspiring: seven angels with the seven last plagues, for through them God's fury is accomplished.

Then I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire. On the sea of glass were standing those who had won the victory over the beast and its image and the number that signified its name.

*They were holding God's harps, and they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb:
"Great and wonderful are your works, Lord God almighty. Just and true are your ways, O king of the nations.*

Who will not fear you, Lord, or glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All the nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

PSALM 98:1, 2-3AB, 7-8, 9

Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done wondrous deeds; His right hand has won victory for him, his holy arm.

*The LORD has made his salvation known: in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice.
He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness toward the house of Israel.*

Let the sea and what fills it resound, the world and those who dwell in it; Let the rivers clap their hands, the mountains shout with them for joy.

Before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to rule the earth; He will rule the world with justice and the peoples with equity.

LUKE 21:12-19

*Jesus said to the crowd:
"They will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name.*

It will lead to your giving testimony. Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute.

You will even be handed over by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name, but not a hair on your head will be destroyed. By your perseverance you will secure your lives."



Well, this is intimidating. It's downright terrifying. How could that not have been Jesus' intent? Not to scare us for scare sake, but to alert us that there are very real threats in this world for Believers:

- Seizure
- Persecution
- Arrest
- Prosecution
- Betrayal
- Execution
- Hatred

Excuse the facetiousness, but that doesn't sound much like a slick Madison Avenue pitch, ie. "Come, join us and die."

Today, so much of our speech tries to convince others to do something our way. We've become sophisticated about sizing up our target audience and saying just those things that attract, cajole and pressure to obtain their cooperation. We continue to manage the dialogue so that they cooperate our way and for our ends. Our society rewards with position, power and possessions.

Jesus just tells us like it is. Jesus' insight into humanity, and even the history of the Jewish people, supports the dire warnings. It is our choice to either accept these threats that accompany a life of discipleship or... refuse to be a disciple.

In re-reading our Gospel passage, I looked through the three paragraphs to see exactly what it is that Jesus is asking of us. There is only one thing: Testify!

Now, maybe some of you have had the experience of testifying in court before. Many of you have not, but you can imagine that a witness on the stand might be nervous, wanting to say the right thing and not wanting to say anything that could hurt their position.

As a police officer, I've been called to the stand many times and yet I would still get nervous.

I remember my first homicide testimony. It was in my rookie year. There had been an armed robbery on the east side of the state where the clerk had been shot and killed. We received a tip that the killer was headed to Kalamazoo on a bus. An arrest team was set up to surprise and arrest the suspect as he got off the bus.

The suspect was dressed and groomed as many were in 1975—like a hippie. The arrest was executed without incident and I was assigned to transport the killer to the city jail. I did so, booked him, and put him in his cell.

A year later the case came to trial on the east side of the state. In the first week, the jury heard the evidence against the defendant about what he did and how he did it. I was subpoenaed to close out the story about how I transported the suspect to jail.

As a rookie, I was pretty nervous. I just wanted to do a good job. But, hang on, this gets worse.

The prosecutor asked me about my actions that day and I told my story. Then he asked me if I could identify the person that I transported that day. Well, I looked over at the defense table and saw the defense attorney and his assistant. Someone was trying to pull a fast one on me. They weren't going to make a fool out of me—I'm a sworn police officer for the City of Kalamazoo, you know.

So, I started to look around the packed courtroom. There in the back row, seated between two burley, cop-aged men, was a skinny young man groomed and dressed like a hippie. So, I said... "He looked kind of like that man there," pointing at the man in the back row. You should have seen that guy's face. The prosecutor caught something in his throat and the jury started snickering. The prosecutor gained his composure and then said to the judge, "May the record reflect that Officer Hall DID NOT identify the defendant." (In my hope for Paradise, I think I'll look up that guy when we get to the other side to ask him what he thought when he showed up one day to watch a much publicized murder trial only to be pointed out as the murderer.)

The defendant was actually the neatly groomed young "assistant" in a suit at the defense table. He resembled little the killer I transported, at least in style and dress. I was excused from the witness stand.

I should have testified to the simple truth: "No, I cannot identify the suspect."

Now, fortunately my botched testimony did not impact the rest of the case. The murderer was found guilty and sentenced to Life. Still, I was an embarrassment to my uniform, my department and to myself.

I should not have "prepared" my testimony to satisfy my emotional need of not letting anyone pull a fast one on me. In the end, I self-destructed all on my own.

If I had only let Jesus give me the wisdom to speak, I would have told the simple truth. When I tried to manipulate the conversation to satisfy my insecurity, it turned out rather badly.

If I had told the simple truth and still the end result turned out to be something other than I desired, I would just have to cope with the result regardless. I would have still retained my integrity, an integrity which is rooted in He who is the source of all truth.

When we allow Jesus to give us a wisdom of speaking, our testimony is freed of all of our self-serving crap. While our testimony could subject us to persecution, betrayal and death, Jesus promises that not a hair on my head would be destroyed, that my perseverance in the Lord's wisdom would secure my life.

You see, there is something worse than persecution, betrayal and death. The life that Jesus promises are our lives unto eternity. To be destroyed, even a hair, means not the death of breathing and beating in this world; it is the annihilation of my eternity.

So, if the dire consequences of martyrdom sound scary, may we allow ourselves to be a lot more scared of our possible destruction.

Jesus repeatedly tells us to not be afraid. We need not fear when we accept His love.

To do it my way, for my want, is to reject his divine love. That way can be really scary.

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