

Quinquagesima (II Febuary 2024)

“THEN Jesus took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.”

+In the Name of...

Some clergymen and parishes like each Mass to have a “theme”. It was tried here once, but it was short lived. I shall refrain from naming the guilty party, as I suspect many of you do not remember. But in those days it was clearly delineated in the Mane Lion. I am more of the persuasion that every Mass has the same theme: the life, death, and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ. That being said, you might remember me saying last week that there was a definite theme in the readings of patience: that old virtue we all know we need but no one is really willing to admit it. The lessons indicated that we need

to have patience with the unbeliever, patience with our fellow believers, and patience with God. That's everybody!

Yet here we are just one Sunday later, and it is mentioned specifically in our epistle, "Charity suffereth long" is translated in more contemporary idiom as "charity (or love) is patient". Our Gospel does not use that exact verbiage, but the scenario that Our Lord predicts for Himself is not one that the average person would relish, even knowing what is waiting on the other side: He was to be mocked, spit upon, scourged and finally put to death. But He was to rise again after these humiliations, so patience would pay off. Yet, Scripture admits that His followers did not understand what He was saying. Patience is hard enough when you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that it will pay off; without that assurance it is nearly impossible.

This week's Kalendar gave us a saint who is likely not familiar to many of us but had to use much patience to survive his calling in life. On Friday the Church celebrated the feast of St. Cyril of Alexandria. This Alexandria is in Egypt, in case any of you thought he was preaching in the suburbs of Washington, DC! Cyril was not born there, although he was a native of Egypt,

during the fifth century. At the same time, one Nestorius was the Patriarch of Constantinople. Cyril was fond of saying that he would not teach anything that he could not attribute to the Early Church Fathers, but Nestorius did not see any reason to keep himself so limited. Specifically, he taught that Christ was born of His mother the way any other man was. He was not divine at birth, but at some point, later, God came and dwelt in Him, kind of like the way you or I might stay in a hotel when we go on a trip. Had this been the case, it would have called into question the entire Incarnation, not to mention redemption. A hallmark of the Christian faith is that our God came down to earth in human form. Sin came into the world through a human, so salvation also had to come via a human, but only God could pay the price, so salvation also had to come through God.

People who have spent a lot of time in the Church will tell you that in order to really muck things up you need a committee, but I would propose that the government would run a close second! Pope Celestine called a local council in Rome which condemned Nestorius, but he paid no attention. At this point, no less than the emperor got involved, who was squarely on the side of

Nestorius. He called an ecumenical council in Ephesus. Cyril had been in charge of carrying out the sentence of the Roman council, and then was Celestine's representative at the Council of Ephesus. Things could have gone very wrong for Cyril, especially opposing the emperor, but he patiently trusted in God's providence. Nestorius, who was in the town but refused to appear before the council, was condemned and excommunicated. One might have thought that was the end, but after the council, 41 other bishops, all in favor of Nestorius, although, oddly, not necessarily his theology, arrived. Because they were too late, they convened their own little "mini-council" where they tried Cyril for heresy and naturally, found him guilty. Both sides appealed to the emperor, who, not wanting to accidentally free a guilty man, put both Cyril AND Nestorius in prison until three representatives from Pope Celestine could arrive and help sort it out. Cyril was vindicated and Nestorius was sent into exile. And some people think history is boring!

Lest you think that this sort of nonsense would not or could not happen today, think again. I do not mean the emperor, or the equivalent would call an ecumenical council. No politician would care enough about the Church to get

that involved! But there seems to be a lack of belief in the divinity of Christ on the part of the contemporary Church! The Church is treated like an unofficial organ of the state, speaking out on moral issues as long as that “speaking out” seems to be headed in the same general direction as the culture.

Christ did not die on the Cross so that the Church could offer tired social commentary. Christ died on the Cross so that we might have eternal life. Look at today’s Gospel: the blind man had his sight restored. The Church used to be in the miracle business, but now we seem happily entrenched in the mundane business: I see signs on church buildings all the time that say something like, “You are welcome here just the way you are.” Sure, everyone is welcome in church, but then once Jesus is in your life, you have to allow Him to change you in whatever way He wants to. Yes, I am welcome. OR maybe I was welcome the way I was, but now that I want Him to be part of my life, I have to be open to His workings in me. And that is a lifelong process. At least one of you is thinking that Jesus has been in your life for as long as you can remember, but that does not make the learning and growing process go away, it just gets more fine-tuned!

I am a sinner, and as long as I fall short of God's expectations (which will be as long as I am breathing), I need Him to work on me. That theme may seem too boring to advertise on a special sign made for the outside of the Parish, but it is the faith once delivered unto the Saints.

The problem with bad habits is that we often like them. We enjoy them, even when we know we should not. Lent starts in just a few short days. This Lent, allow God to do the miraculous: allow Him to change you into what He wants you to be.

+In the Name of...