

4th Sunday of Easter
April 25, 2021
“The Courage of Love and Faith”

Acts 4:8-12
1 Jn 3:1-2
Jn 10:11-18

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

How is it that some people can exhibit tremendous courage at challenging times in their lives? How can they risk their life for another in an extremely dangerous situation? How are they able to donate a kidney or a lobe of their liver to a family member or to someone they hardly know? What motivated the millions of Christian martyrs who died rather than deny their belief in God or in His Son, Jesus Christ?

This is not an easy question to answer. However, I suspect that love – and the relationship that comes with love – is the major underlying factor.

Truly good people – people with good hearts – do difficult things for others because they love them or love someone close to them. And the ultimate reason to be heroic is because they love God and know God in a very personal relationship. They, somehow, intuit that God is asking them for the sacrifice they are making.

Some people do difficult things because it is their job. They are paid to do difficult or dangerous things. However, their sense of obligation can quickly evaporate if they become threatened, become frightened, or are enticed away from their sense of duty.

In the Gospel selection, Jesus tells us that he is the “good shepherd”. The heart of Jesus is filled with goodness. We are the “sheep” who belong to him and his Father. He guides us, protects us, and cares for us in every way. Moreover, he stands and defends us from anyone or anything that can harm us. Jesus even lays down his life so that we, his sheep, can have a better life than we ever could imagine!

Jesus could do all of this because he knows and loves the Father. He has an intimate life with the Father. He understands that we, the sheep, are also created and loved by the Father. Moreover, the Father wishes us to enter eternal life with Him after our time here.

Jesus also understood that if he laid down his life out of love, the Father would allow him to take it up once again – and in glory. Although we cannot take up our life after we lay it down, Jesus and the Father will raise us up to be with them – in a life that can never end!

The passage from the Acts of the Apostles records for us the courage of the disciples in the early Church. The Jewish religious leaders could not accept Jesus or anything he said or did. They condemned Jesus and put him to death. However, when raised, Jesus empowered his disciples to carry on his mission.

Consequently, when Peter healed the crippled man in the name and in the power of Jesus, the authorities were upset. Peter was arrested, but boldly and courageously told the truth. He tried to open that leadership, again, to who Jesus was and the true Messianic salvation he brought. But it was, largely, to no avail. The leadership could not accept Jesus, because they did not really know Jesus or the Father who sent him.

Peter and those other disciples would never back down from their mission to teach and share the Gospel of Jesus! They would even suffer and die for what they knew, loved, and believed!

St. John reminds us, in his First Letter, that true Christians and disciples will never be understood by the secular world. The secular world cannot possibly know us – if those in it don't know Jesus or the Father who sent him. Unfortunately, they will miss out on so much for not knowing Jesus, the Father, or the Holy Spirit. They will live lives of desperation here – and deny that there is a hereafter of promise.

Brothers and Sisters, we can do anything or suffer anything if we love. Love always presupposes a relationship – even if it is the indescribable relationship of faith with God. We are truly blessed in this relationship, now – How we will be blessed in eternity is beyond our ability to know or comprehend.

So, let us pray, that we always live as God's faithful children, now – so that we can be unbelievably more – in God's eternal kingdom when we see Him face to face!

Amen.

April 25, 2021

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