

April 2, 2020
Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent
JOHN 8:51-59

Activity for today:

- Read Today's Readings
- Fr. Brian's Gospel Reflection
- Prayer of the Day
- Spiritual Challenge for the Day

Fr. Brian's Gospel Reflection

Daily Reflection on John 8:51-59

"Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." This refrain is often sung after an episode of name-calling by kids on a playground. Jesus could just as easily sing it back to the crowd in today's gospel that mocks and rejects Him. Jesus has so many false accusations thrown at him. Two days ago, we heard people insinuate that Jesus was a danger to himself (John 8:22). Today the crowd says that he is 'possessed' (John 8:52). Back in Mark 3:21, even some within his clan said of Him that "He is out of His mind". The worst name-calling and ridicule will come at his torture and crucifixion when Pilate, Herod, the Sanhedrin and the soldiers mock Him sarcastically, dressing him in purple, crowning Him with thorns and bowing-spitting at Him cruelly (John 19:15 & Matthew 27:28-30). Yet, Jesus is unmoved by their mean-spirited detractions. He sets the noble example of 'bearing wrongs patiently'. For as 1 Peter 2:23 says, "When Jesus was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten; instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly." Where does such heroic patience and inner strength come from? From knowing oneself well and who you live in perfect relation to: For Jesus, this is the perfect communion of the Father and Holy Spirit with Him, through Him and in Him. Unlike the sinful crowd, Jesus mentions *knowing perfectly who He knows best*, and that is the Father. Jesus serves and glorifies the Father, and He knows the Father loves Him with a perfect love and glorifies Him in return. That relationship is what steadies and strengthens Jesus through all persecutions, slights and injuries (even death). The more Jesus exhibits a persevering calm, the more the crowd becomes unsettled and this can be seen in their increasing attacks. They really don't know how to approach or understand Him. In John 8:25, they asked, "Who are you?" and in John 8:53 they ask it another way, "Who do you make yourself out to be?" As an offer to His own credentials, Jesus uses Abraham as a personal reference on his resume, when he says in John 8:5 "Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad." Of course, this sends the crowd to the moon because by their calculations Abraham would be about 1900 years old (& of course long dead-except to God). But Jesus mentions Abraham, because the crowd had been claiming kinship to Abraham. Jesus was pointing out that His teaching and His way of living was only a simple current extension of Abraham's faith. Recall that Jesus has already had one public conference with the great patriarchs of the Old Testament-Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration to show His continuity with Faith Ancestors (Matthew 17:3). Maybe it was never recorded but since Jesus brings up Abraham today, I wonder if there might not have been

another transfiguration-like scene when Jesus' divinity was shone again but with a public conference this time with Abraham and Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18, Hebrews 7:1). It would amount to two more witnesses added to Jesus' corner. But, not that Jesus needs them, because Jesus is confident of His Father's love. He knows that His service honors the Father and that the Father's Will overcomes all obstacles, even death. Jesus had begun this whole verbal exchange today by saying that whoever kept or lived His word 'would not taste death'. Quite a promise, but we know that the Father does raise Jesus up from death and that the hope of our resurrection is rooted in that same faithfulness to the Word of God. Jesus gives it just before raising Lazarus from the dead, saying, "Whosoever believes in me, even if they die, shall live forever" (John 11:25). Such power of resurrection should give us patient strength and persevering calm to endure all (name-calling, ridicule even persecution) for the glory of God and the honor of the Name of Jesus. Or definitely it should give us strength to love and serve our neighbor for Jesus' sake!

Prayer of the Day: O Dear Lord, three things I pray: to see you more clearly, to love you more dearly and follow you more nearly, day by day, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen

Lord Jesus Christ, I thank You for all the blessings You have given me, and for all the sufferings and shame You have endured for me. I thank you for being by my side when, for no reason, they persecute me. Lord, it hurts so much when I am abused, accused and condemned. They bring all manner of falsehoods against me. But in the midst of it all, I know that you will preserve me. I will arise stronger and better because you are on my side. No weapon or charge formed against me shall prosper. You, my Shepherd, are all-powerful and almighty. And despite the situation I'm in, I place my trust in you. All things work for good for those who love and cling to you. Give me patience and courage, for you know how willing I should be to bear insult, and pain, and death for You; therefore have mercy on me, and to to You, I commend my spirit." Amen (Prayer of St Richard of Chichester)

Spiritual Challenge of the Day: Name two or three recent martyrs in the Catholic Church. Canonizations take a long time with a detailed process of examination, so the martyrs you identify do not have to be declared saints yet. Who are two or three recent ones? Read up on their lives and situations.