

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
May 12, 2019  
“Persecution: Then and Now”

Acts 13:43-52

Rev 7:9...17

Jn 10:27-30

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

Every age on our planet has certain groups of people who are persecuted in some way. People are persecuted because of their color, their race, their politics, and, sadly, even because of their religious beliefs.

Sometimes the persecution is direct and violent; – it often results in the death of those persecuted. At other times it is subtle and insidious. It is physically non-violent. However, it attacks the very soul of a person and can result in the moral death of the soul and spirit.

In the past, persecution often came from those who felt threatened by new ideas, new directions, and new discoveries. But in the present day, it can come from those unthinking people who wish to revert to primitive kinds of thinking and behavior.

Thus, there is a “neo-paganism” that has come forth in recent years that sees the individual person as supreme. Therefore, what the individual wants and desires is absolute! There is no thought or regard for the common good or for the ultimate consequences of the behavior they espouse.

Among these are: the rise of radical Islam, the sexual revolution, abortion rights, the LGBTQ sub-culture, disrespect for the environment, the loss of reverence for human life, and the belief that the “ends justify the means”!

The disciples of Jesus and the early Christians were often persecuted on two different fronts. In today’s reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Paul and Barnabas were reviled and driven out of Antioch. The traditional Jews saw them as a threat to established Jewish belief and practice. Paul and Barnabas were winning converts from both Judaism and from the Gentiles.

The way of Jesus brought a new hope to everyone. Jesus revealed a God of love – a God of mercy and forgiveness. The way of Jesus was not based on the Mosaic Law or the Torah – but on a new Commandment of Love that Jesus had proclaimed! Certainly, it required self-denial and personal sacrifice – But these were undertaken out of love for God and for others – as well as for personal spiritual growth and development.

We also know that the disciples and early Christians were persecuted by pagan Rome. They would not worship the emperor or burn incense to the pagan gods. Consequently, they were branded as enemies of the state and often condemned to death. What sustained all those faithful disciples in the past was their faith and trust in Jesus and in the one God he came to reveal.

In the Gospel selection, Jesus reveals that he is our divine shepherd who knows us, guides us, and protects us. If we are faithful to Jesus and to our commitment to him, we shall never perish, despite what we suffer during our life here. We can hear his truth in the Gospels, as well as his voice and the voice of his Spirit in our hearts and souls. This enables us to follow him despite the siren call of the culture and the pseudo claims of every impostor. Because if we are in the hand of Jesus, we are in the hand of the Father – and no one can “snatch us away”!

Finally, in the Book of Revelation, St. John had the vision of a huge crowd beyond any enumeration. They were from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They were risen and resplendent before the throne of God. They were giving glory to God and would experience a new life – a life without any physical or emotional hardship and pain.

Brothers and Sisters, there is no life on this earth without difficulty and pain. Our journey here will always have its hardships. Moreover, there will always be someone to persecute us. There will always be those who urge us to compromise, to take the easy way, to succumb to the mores of the culture, to be politically correct, and to put ourselves first. But there is no real future in this – nor is there peace or lasting joy.

So, let us pray, that we can come to know the risen Jesus better – May we see his Gospel as the only truth – And may we come to inherit the eternal life he has promised for all faithful and authentic disciples!

Amen.

May 12, 2019

Msgr. Russell G. Terra