

3rd Sunday of Easter
May 5, 2019
“Dying for a Belief”

Acts 5:27...41
Rev 5:11-14
Jn 21:1-14

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

People who are willing to die for a cause must have very strong beliefs. Soldiers who die in battle must truly believe in the cause for which they are fighting. Anyone who risks their life to save or rescue another must necessarily believe that the other person's life is, somehow, more valuable than their own.

However, most people will not give up their own life without a fight. Most people faced with a mortal threat would rather kill the assailant than be killed themselves.

The extraordinary thing about most Christian disciples, is that they will die for their beliefs without trying to defend themselves! In fact, it would seem that they treasure their beliefs more than their own life on this Earth! For them, their spiritual life with God is far more valuable than their material life – even that with their loved ones.

True Christians sincerely believe in a life after death. They truly believe in their own resurrection because of the Resurrection of Jesus. Moreover, they believe in this truth without any tangible proof beforehand. They believe because of the testimony of others about the Resurrection of Jesus. And they believe because others before them have believed and died as martyrs for this belief!

Jesus Christ was from Nazareth in Galilee. He is the only person who validated all that he taught about God by coming back from the dead. No one believed that he could do this, not even his disciples and closest friends. Jesus predicted his suffering and death, as well as his return – But no one really understood him or took him seriously. This is the reason for his multiple appearances to his disciples after his crucifixion and burial.

In today's Gospel selection, seven of the disciples were still at a loss regarding the events of that first Easter Sunday. Gathered near the lake, they decided to resume their fishing occupation. So they fished all night – but without success. However, at first light, a stranger on the shore made a suggestion. They followed it and were overwhelmed with

a tremendous catch of fish.

Realizing that it was Jesus, they hastened to the shore. There, they were asked to share in a meal with Jesus. In this Eucharistic encounter, they began to know and understand what they could not before:

- that Jesus truly was the Son of God – that he was risen from the dead –
- that he became present whenever disciples gathered together, broke bread, and gave thanks –
- and that they could share his risen life if they remained faithful to the Gospel he had given them.

In the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the disciples were fearless and resolute when the Jewish religious authorities tried to silence them. Even though they were persecuted for the rest of their lives, and, eventually, put to death, they refused to back down. Fearlessly, they proclaimed the Resurrection of Jesus and the Gospel of salvation to all who would listen. And without physically defending themselves, they died, rather than deny what they believed. They did so with confidence in the Holy Spirit who always guided them!

On the island of Patmos, John, the Evangelist, lived in exile because of what he believed and taught. He refused to worship the emperor as a god and paid the price. After trying to poison John, they removed him to that rocky island where they thought he could no longer teach and bear witness publicly. (In fact, his words for us today proclaim that only God and the Risen Christ can be given the tribute and honor and glory that the emperor demanded for himself!)

Thus, John thwarted them. On Patmos, John wrote extensively. And we are the blessed recipients of all that he wrote:

- about Jesus –
- about God's love and mercy in our regard –
- about the great commandment of Jesus to love –
- about the flesh and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist –
- and about all that awaits us after our sojourn here in this life!

Brothers and Sisters, we are here in this church, today, because we believe and trust those witnesses who have gone before us. We believe that we, too, will rise some day to be with them and with Jesus in the presence of the Godhead. So, let us pray, that we, ourselves, may be faithful witnesses to all those who follow after us!

Amen.

May 5, 2019

Msgr. Russell G. Terra