

For it is written, my house shall be a house of prayer

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On November 10, 1793 the “Feast of Reason” was celebrated in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, France. French Revolutionaries set up an altar in the Nave of the Cathedral and enshrined an opera singer in robes of blue, white and red upon the altar. And there the crowd of revolutionaries worshipped the goddess of Liberty. For three years the revolution had tried to de-Christianize France, exiling and executing countless Catholics; Bishops, priests, nuns, and monks. Their goal to replace the powerful and antiquated Catholic Church with a more civil and popular religion. They wanted to replace Catholicism with a religion of philosophy, that would enshrine their ideals of general will, public opinion, positive liberty, and humanism, and yet they only managed to pervert Philosophy.

One of the great priests whose vocation was nurtured in the underground church during those horrendous years of the French Revolution was St. John Vianney. Years later, St. John Vianney would be sent to pick up the pieces of a broken parish and to reconvert his people. In the wake of such social upheaval, of famine, war, and spiritually laziness from the void left by the Catholic Church, St. John Vianney taught his parish to pray every morning, *O God, send me thy [Holy] Spirit to teach me what I am and what Thou art.*

In 18th century France, the people had forgotten who they were and what God was calling them to be. They had turned to all authorities other than the Church to find their identity. Or like the Pharisees of old, they had taken only one part of the truth and built an entire identity around it. The Pharisees prided themselves on being sons of Abraham, on being righteous keepers of the Law, and this became their identity. And, we find today that we are not all that different, not much has changed since the time of the Temple or the French Revolution. The Church is undermined, our identities in Christ found through Word and Sacrament in His Church are challenged by the very culture we live in. Politics, radicals and fear-mongers aside, a culture which idealizes individualism, comfort, and excess are enough to shake the foundations of our faith.

And so, we do well to remember that even in this *land of the free and home of the brave*, it takes the Holy Spirit for our faith to survive. It takes Grace as well to hang on to our faith in this world. The Epistle this morning tells us of how the Holy Spirit works in our Lives and in the Body of the Church. Of course, in it, St. Paul is not saying that this is an easy business.

St. Paul is not telling us that by way of varying and different *super-powers from above*, we shall be put right or that we shall automatically be protected from the spiritual dangers that threaten our faith. Nor is he saying that we shall be the recipients of individual special gifts that mark us off from one another and exaggerate our uniqueness. The Holy Spirit isn't much interested in individualism and He certainly doesn't want us to become arrogant or proud because we think that He is showering us with special attention. Nor does He intend that the gifts He gives to us should enable us to embark on any faith journey alone or without relation to other members of the Body of Christ, the Church. The Holy Spirit gives us the strength in every circumstance to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and to live lives pleasing to Him.

The French Revolution and the money changers we find in the Temple, in this morning's Gospel, show us exactly what a culture can do to the Church. France, prior to the French Revolution, was a nation dedicated to God the Holy Trinity. Ancient Israel, according to the Scriptures, was a nation founded by God and called to be wholly devoted to Him, keeping His Law. Yet the people began to see how they could take advantage of God's Law and how money could be made in the Temple Court. The Ancient Jews, like their French successors much later, perverted the Law and before long the Temple, which was to be a place of prayer and sacrifice had become a lucrative business. The Ancient Jews even devised a way to make money off of their religion. They would sell indulgences and collect money from poor people in exchange for priestly prayers and intercessions. It was the same for the French Revolutionaries. For what did they do? Moved by greed, they were determined to rob the Churches blind both of earthly treasure and power. They justified their thieving by convincing the masses that they would redistribute the treasure and so they persecuted the Church.

We do not live in as perilous a time as the French Revolution, nor do we find any money changers set up in the Parish Hall or Narthex of our church. But we do live in a culture that praises self-help, individualism, and popular religion. The popular messages of the day are of individual empowerment and entitlement.

And all the while, Christians in America have forgotten about their first love and true calling to salvation. Jesus teaches us this morning that His Gospel has little or nothing to do with earthly riches at all. He teaches that His Gospel is the call to salvation. He teaches us that earthly commerce and business, the exchange of money for the purposes of making people better off and the cry for earthly justice have nothing to do with what He,

Our Lord, is all about. His frustration and anger at those who ought to be about the Lord's business is evident in today's Gospel lesson. Our Lord does not go into the Temple and say His prayers and look the other way, He goes in and throws out the money changers. History teaches also that those in France who sought the demise of the Church were thrown out of power. We serve a living God, who fills the whole world, who cleanses His Church from corruption who will not allow His people to be taken advantage of.

Our identities, our empowerment, our entitlement must be rooted in Jesus Christ. We must take St. John Vianney's advice and pray daily, *O God send me Thy Holy Spirit, to teach me who I am and who thou art.* For it is only the Holy Spirit who can reveal to us and make us who God intends for us to be. It is only after we have allowed God to make us and transform us into His image, that we can truly give ourselves in worship to God in holiness and in truth. May we remember the prayer of the simple and yet profound St. John Vianney, and pray, *O God, send us your Holy Spirit to teach us who we are, and who you are. Amen.*