

*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.*

+

Blessed John Keble, the great English priest who began the Anglo Catholic revival which we are inheritors of, writes, *The Church, in her collect for today, directs us how to pray for stability in truth, in sound doctrine, as a sign and indispensable requisite of something better than mere childhood in religion.* In today's world, "truth" seems to be only what makes us feel good, is attractive, or popular. But the world's "truth" is not what the Collect and lessons for today would lead us to believe, and it is not what the church would have us to be content with. We remember also in celebrating the feast day of St. Mark the Evangelist that what makes us feel good or is attractive or popular are not always what is worth dying for. Only the truth is worth dying for, and that truth which we believe, confess, and defend is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His Church.

Today we celebrate the feast day of St. Mark the Evangelist, one of the seventy disciples, the very same Mark whose name is attached to the second Gospel in our Bibles. The commentaries agree that this Gospel was written from St. Mark's personal recollections of the accounts of St. Peter. St. Mark was a companion of St. Peter while St. Peter was in Babylon and is even mentioned in the First Epistle General of St. Peter. St. Mark's Gospel is thought to have been a template for the other three Gospels, but most importantly it preserves the story of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, and this was sent throughout the Early Church, not for St. Mark's or St. Peter's glory, but for the glory of Jesus Christ. St. Mark provides a safeguard to the early church and to the church today, something to measure every doctrine, every truth against, which is the Gospel, the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. The greatest test of everything that is touted as "truth" is if it can stand in accordance with the Gospel. Anything that is proclaimed as "truth" but contradicts Jesus Christ and His Law is not the truth but is a lie. We do, after all, need more than the Cliff-Note version of Scripture, which seems to reduce the Gospel to *Thou shalt Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy mind...with all thy being, and thy neighbor as thyself.*

We find in the Gospel what we can measure "truth" against but let us not ignore the fact that we too will one day be measured against the Gospel. We have heard that there are some called to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists...some, pastors and teachers...and I might add some laity, some students, some mothers and fathers, some friends, *all for the perfecting of the saints.* All for the perfecting of each other, until we all *come together in unity of*

*the faith and of the knowledge of God*, until we ourselves be made like Christ. Until we ourselves become like Christ sounds like a tall order but is God's intention for us. After all, today we hear Jesus say, *I am the vine and you are the branches*. We have been baptized and grafted into the vine which is Jesus Christ. We are a part of the Body of Christ, and as we are members of that Body, and a vine from that branch we must let the truth of God and the blood of Christ flow through us. To refuse the truth of Jesus, to cut ourselves off from the Body of Christ, is death, just as a branch from a vine withers and is unable to survive once it has been cut from the vine and thrown away.

This is why we must seek Christian maturity. It takes a mature soul, a soul that has drunk deeply from the wells of God's Truth to realize the necessity of accepting what is right, true and good in God's eyes. A mature Christian soul realizes that to accept any other truth as Gospel and walk away from God's Church is to wither away and die spiritually. We see this in the life of St. Mark the Evangelist. St. Mark was not among the twelve disciples. He could have gone off and followed any other teachers, rabbis, or philosophers, and there were many in his day. But St. Mark had learned enough of God's truth that he was able to recognize the bearer of that truth in St. Peter and the other disciples, and he became their faithful companion.

St. Mark heeded the call of the Gospel, and he flowered and brought forth fruit. The fruit of his life's work, along with his Gospel is the establishment of the church of Alexandria in Egypt, there he converted many to Christianity, and the Church at Alexandria became such a good example of Christianity that even Philo, the famous Jewish scholar and critic of Jesus Christ was amazed by it. We must remember also that if Jesus is the vine and we are the branches, and we allow God's truth to flow through us, then we are expected to flower and bring forth fruit. To bear fruit, to show the signs and marks of Jesus Christ in our lives is how others know we are living lives worthy of Christ. The Lord is very clear about what happens if we do not bring forth fruit in our lives, and He warns us many times throughout the Gospels that those who do not bring forth fruit will be pulled up and cast away, they will be forever separated from Him.

St. Mark was a successful apostle, he was a successful priest and bishop even by today's standards, but he did not live out the remainder of his days resting in his accomplishments in Alexandria. Rather, he gave up his life for the Truth, as a martyr on Easter Sunday, in the year 68 AD. We learn from St. Mark that not only must we measure what we perceive to be as truth against the truth of the Gospel, but we must measure ourselves and our lives against the Gospel. We often make the

excuse that we will never measure up to Jesus Christ, but if we are striving to live a Christian life then we must find some areas where we have allowed Jesus Christ and His Truth to have an effect.

We pray this morning along with St. Mark that we *be not tossed to and fro with every blast of vain doctrine*. We thank God for the Holy Spirit who inspired the Holy Scriptures, who helps us to recognize the Truth of God. And we thank God for His Church, who through the help of her Apostles, Evangelists, and all the saints teaches us how to live better lives in union with Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. This means following Jesus and carrying the Cross of His truth into a world which will accept neither Christ nor His truth. May we be ever grateful for the truth and wisdom of God as recorded from the lips of St. Peter by St. Mark the Evangelist and be inspired to live lives that reflect the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His Church. Amen.