

**33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)**  
**(Malachi 3:19-20 / Luke 21:5-19)**  
**17.11.2013**

A line stands out for me in this morning's gospel passage upon which I suggest we reflect on for just a few minutes.

I am thinking of the encouragement Jesus gives His disciples to see whatever difficulties or trials befall them as providing them with an *opportunity to bear witness* to Him.

Who among us is not led at some time or other to traverse trials and difficulties?

When *the going becomes tough for us*, I hear Jesus' words spoken to the disciples this morning as an encouragement to us to live through our trials positively, seeing them as providing *us* with the an opportunity to bear witness to Christ and to the faith that is within us.

I am sure, like me, you will often have heard people say when they are under great stress and strain: *Only for God, or, only for the power of prayer, I just don't know how I would get through my present ills.*

Maybe we ourselves have said this kind of thing.

To speak like this amounts to bearing witness to Christ!

At other times we see people suffer (and do so in nothing less than heroic fashion!) in silence, without opening their mouth.

These people don't have to speak their faith; it is evident for all to see that what sustains them is their trust in God.

Such people bear just as eloquent a witness (and often an even more eloquent witness) to Christ as those who resort to words to express their faith.

The words of the prophet Isaiah, which tradition has applied to Christ, spring to mind here: *Like a gentle lamb He was led to the slaughter not opening His mouth.*

The psalmist's observation ties in with this when he remarks: *No speech, no word, no voice is heard ... and yet their span extends to the utmost bounds of the world.*

Words certainly aren't everything when it comes to bearing witness!

Indeed, we could argue that they are of a secondary order.

Witness to Christ is borne most eloquently by those who are configured and conformed to Him!

How many silent witnesses have really *spoken* to us simply *by their way of being*!

Perhaps the most eloquent testimony any of us can give is the way we live through suffering in our lives ... and not least that most terrible suffering which comes from the betrayal of those in whom we have trusted, people upon whom we should have been able to count.

Who among us has not suffered a betrayal by a loved one?

And, dare I add, who among us has not been a betrayer in one way or another ... if in no other way than by the fact that we simply weren't courageous enough to be there for others when they needed us, when they longed for us to manifest our solidarity with them, in their trials and suffering in some small way?

The One who shows us how to make our way through suffering and injustice is Christ Himself.

Jesus knew betrayal.

Jesus knew suffering.

He knew what it was to be left alone by many of those upon whom He should have been able to count in His hour of need.

Just think of the promises that were made to Him by someone like Peter.

Peter had assured Jesus that even if all the others were to betray Him, he would never betray Him.

And yet, what happened?

Peter fled!

Not only that, Peter actually bore audible counter-testimony in Jesus' regard. When he was pointed out as one of Jesus' companions, he said clearly: *I do not know the man ... I never had anything to do with Him.*

The passion narratives draw to our attention that Jesus traversed His suffering and pain without raising His voice. It is precisely in this way, in silence, that Jesus bore the most eloquent testimony ever given to God's infinite love for His people ... love which included those who put Him to death.

If the line which speaks of *opportunity being given to bear witness* to Christ strikes me forcibly as I read today's gospel passage, another line in the text also remains with me. It is the bottom line of today's gospel passage: *Your endurance will win you your lives.* In fact it really is one word that jumps out of the page to me: ***endurance***

Endurance is a remarkable quality.

We can show ourselves enthusiastic for a moment. We can make great declarations at such times.

That is what Peter did, for example, when he said that even if all the others abandoned Jesus he wouldn't.

Words are easy!

The best testimony we can render, the most eloquent witness we can bear, is to endure, to persevere ... to *hang in there* when the going is particularly tough.

St Benedict emphasises the importance of endurance in his Rule for Monks.

While Benedict never goes our 'courting' suffering (and he certainly would not have us do that either) he recognises that suffering is an inevitable part of our life experience.

Realistic as he is, he sees the sort of sufferings Jesus alludes to in today's gospel passage arising even in monasteries.

Benedict speaks realistically (perhaps even shockingly) of the possibility of us encountering what he calls *false brethren* in the monastery.

Elsewhere in the Rule he insists that we love our enemies.

Like Christ the Master, Benedict is not denying that we can and most probably will meet with enemies in the course of our lifetime ... maybe even in community life, as Jesus said we might even in our family circle!

When it comes to the inevitable sufferings with which we are confronted in life Benedict tells us that our reaction should be one of *endurance/perseverance*.

In Benedict's teaching a word comes back frequently: *sustinere*.

What Benedict is saying when he uses this Latin word is that *we must hold firm* in the most difficult circumstances, following the example of Christ and sustained by it. He assures us that as long as we hold firm in Christ we will be able to put up with and make our way through whatever trials come our way.

The thing that makes *endurance* possible is **love!**

If, as St Paul claims, *love endures forever*, I think we can fairly say that to show real endurance is to manifest heroic love.

It is love which holds and sustains us: God's love for us ... and our love for Him.

In his Rule for Monks Benedict sees this love expressed particularly in prayer.

In response to the questions we ask - *How can we endure trials? What can we do when we find ourselves in the crucible of suffering? What will permit us to 'hold in there' and come through this tunnel in the end?* - Benedict would answer: living in union with Christ!

At the end of the Prologue of the Rule Benedict speaks of *sharing Christ's sufferings in the monastery until death so that we may attain a share with Him in glory*.

The message is clear, the way to life beyond suffering is **union with Christ in love!**

Suffering can only be truly and courageously assumed and traversed if we live it in a relationship of love with God in prayer, otherwise we run the risk of allowing the difficulties we encounter to destroy us.

At the hour of His passion and when hanging upon the cross *Jesus prayed*.

St Benedict insists that the monk (hear there every Christian) must pray in moments of trial. This is because Benedict sees the only way through suffering is to be consolidated in one's relationship of trust with God.

There is something mysterious and even wonderful when it comes to the transforming power of suffering endured at the hands of others - especially those closest to us, those with whom we share our lives, those in whom we have placed our trust and who have let us down and/or even consciously betrayed us.

It is that the suffering we endure at their hands can open us up to an even deeper relationship with them!

St Benedict, in echo to Christ, says that *we must bless those who persecute us!*  
Isn't that something?!

The evil of suffering which is malediction and a curse, instead of destroying us, can and should lead to good, benediction, a blessing!

To bless those who persecute us, to forgive them ... This is certainly the most eloquent testimony to Christian love any of us can render.