

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

(Malachi 3:19-20 / Luke 21:5-19)

17.11.2019

*In His Name*

“Your endurance will win you your lives.”

The kind of endurance Jesus is speaking about here has nothing to do with stubbornness, it is not about being obstinately stuck in the mud. Jesus does not exhort us to cling fearfully to a set of dogmas, traditions or customs... even if dogmas, traditions and customs are not necessarily bad things in themselves.

Three times in the fourteen verses we have just heard, Jesus mentions his name. One's name in the Bible is not simply a conventional designation but rather the person himself or herself. The name of God reveals his presence, his identity and power. In Jesus' name “we adore the entire majesty of the Godhead” (St. Peter Chrysologus).

When Jesus says: “many will come using my name...”, he means: “Many will come using me...” and when he says: “you will be hated on account of my name”, he means: “you will be hated because of me”.

Jesus' point is made clear by St Paul's words: “There is only Christ: he is everything and he is in everything” (Col 3:11). What matters is whether or not Jesus is at the centre of our lives, whether or not everything is about him, about our relationship with him. St Peter reminds us that we bear his name (cf. 1P 4:16). In a very real way, because his name is his presence, we can say with St Paul: “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

So the call to endure means that we have to persevere in our relationship with Christ, in allowing him to grow within us to his full measure and stature (cf. Eph 4:13). Our endurance is a sign of our desire to be faithful to our identity as Christ bearers in the world.

The first time Jesus speaks of his name in our Gospel reading what he says concerns those who speak falsely in his name.

We are all tempted to fall into the trap of misusing Jesus' name. The temptation is to use Jesus' name for self-promotion.

In fact, this happens each time we present ourselves as Christians and act and speak in ways that are opposed to the Gospel.

In the English-speaking world, you are very fond of letters after names which indicate degrees and honorific titles: BD, DD, PhD, OBE, PP and many others... Sometimes we do something of the same thing with our belonging to Christ. It becomes just a few letters, a label used to make a person's name look good without implying a radical change in the identity of the owner.

In society and politics, Jesus' name is often used to rally the troops or to strengthen the cohesion and unity of the tribe. We have to be very cautious of political parties which pose themselves as defenders of Christianity and religious liberties. If we look at history, we see that when politicians claim to defend the Church, at the end, most of the time, they are using the Church for their own purpose.

The second mention of the name of Jesus is also a challenge for us. In other parts of the world, there are Christians who are martyred on account of Jesus' name. They are killed not because of their belonging to a particular denomination or for their defence of a theological aspect of the Christian faith but because they bear the name of Christ.

In spite of what some may say, I do not think that Christians are martyred in Europe or in North America. What the media and other people challenge and attack, sometimes unfairly and violently, is not Christ but the Churches. Here we must ask ourselves whether the anger and opposition we experience is caused by our belonging to Christ, the fact that we bear his name or whether it is not because of our mistakes, our refusal to be accountable, our pride, our judgemental attitudes and our intransigence.

The question is important because we have to be willing to assume our part of responsibility in the present crisis. As Christians are we really the innocent victims of an ill-intentioned and unfair society?

Maybe the greatest challenge for us lies in the fact that, as Jesus suggests, antagonism and conflict have to become for us the very opportunities whereby we are led to bear witness to Christ and his Gospel.

The real crisis we are going through should not turn us into a fearful people; it should not lead us to become withdrawn or inward looking. Very concretely when we are faced with difficulties our first reaction should not be to build walled communities or to develop a siege mentality but to bear better witness to Christ.

Jesus' message in today's Gospel reading is clear: challenges and difficulties should spur us on to cling to Christ all the more, to remain in deeper relationship with him, to strengthen our reliance on God who is our hope.

In the verses from the book of the prophet Malachi we heard today, the Lord tells that those who revere his name have nothing to fear. If we want to revere the name of the Lord, we have to humbly acknowledge and respect his presence within ourselves, in others and indeed in the whole of his creation.

The Lord Jesus has made known to us the name of God so that love may be in us, so that we may be as loving as our heavenly Father is loving (cf. Jn 17:26). Whatever the circumstances, whatever may happen in our lives and in the lives of those around us, because of the name of the Lord, let us love, let us drive out the darkness of anger, bigotry, self-sufficiency with the light of love.

The name of the Lord is a light for our path, "music in the ear, a song in the heart" (St Bernard). It is a song which gives courage when the journey is tough. Let us bless the name of the Lord, may love sing in all that we do and say.