

2nd Thursday in Easter
May 5, 2011
Fr. Joe Bambenek
Sisters of Our Lady Immaculate convent private chapel, Cambridge, ON

Acts 5:27-33

Psalm 34

John 3:31-36

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth.

In today's three scripture readings, the two readings and the responsorial psalm, we are reminded of the importance of speaking the Lord's praises.

In the first reading we hear the Apostles speaking the truths of Jesus with great courage. After having been arrested, and then freed overnight by an angel, the Apostles are brought before the Sanhedrin and they are challenged on their continuing to preach the gospel. Their words so enrage the Sanhedrin leaders that they now want to put the Apostles to death. Knowing that Jesus was brutally put to death by the workings of the same men, in fact in today's reading we hear the Apostles blaming the crucifixion of Jesus on the Sanhedrin, how do the Apostles respond? Do they back down? Do they at least qualify their comments so as to assuage the guilt of the members of the Sanhedrin? Of course not. Once filled with the Holy Spirit, they remain on fire and are courageous. Their pre-Pentecost days of denying and running away from the Lord are long gone.

As our culture seemingly continues to move farther and farther away from God, to go away from its Christian foundations, it becomes ever more likely that we could face a similar fate for merely proclaiming the truths of the faith. When challenged on the truths of the gospel; and on the implications it has for living a moral life, we must remain strong. How do we remain strong in such circumstances? First, we can turn to today's reading and the many of the others from the New Testament for encouragement. There we hear of the great fruit that is born when we do not cower to fear; but rather, boldly proclaim the truth. There we hear of how the Lord intervenes to miraculously protect His beloved. There we are reminded of the glorious fate of those who persevere to the end.

Second, we come here to the Eucharist to be nourished by Jesus. You, as sisters, come here in a special and unique way to be fed by your bridegroom, by the One who has asked you to marry him as Sr. Mary Augustine so beautifully put it last night [in her speech at the Serran banquet].

Third, we can ask each other for prayers. We can encourage one another through our deeds and words. And we can ask the communion of saints for prayers. In your community you have the Blessed Mother as your special patroness. Throughout the building, with its many lovely statues, we are reminded of the saints who are looking out for us, if we only but ask them to intercede for us. We walk past the beautiful statue of St. Rita standing guard at the door to the convent itself, reminding us of how God can intervene in powerful, seemingly impossible ways in the world if we only invite Him. Of how He can bring peace and reconciliation to difficult situations; ones that might seem impossible to resolve.

Finally, let us turn to the Holy Spirit, in particular. For it was the Holy Spirit who made the difference in the lives of the Apostles; Who transformed them from cowards to heroes. Who, as Jesus tells us [elsewhere in the Scriptures], gives us the words [to speak] in times of persecution. And in today's gospel, we hear the comforting words that "*He does not ration his gift of the Spirit.*" Which means that there is no need for us to be jealous of the gifts given to another to speak; for they are not their own words... [and their having them does not block us from receiving them too]. There is no need to fear that the Holy Spirit will run out of help for us or for others. Probably the biggest surprise for me the past 2 years since I was ordained a deacon is how much the Holy Spirit wants to help those of us who preach with our homilies... How He wants to help us speak the words He wants His people to hear. And this help in speaking it is not limited to priests and deacons. Last night Sr. MariaFaustina and MaryAugustine did such a beautiful job of praising the Lord, of giving testimony at the Serran banquet.

It is a privilege to be here with you today, to speak the Lord's praises, and to do so as part of a Mass of Thanksgiving. At this Mass, at which I say "thank you" to God in a special way for the gift of my vocation, I also come here to say "thank you" to Him for the great gift of my friendship with your mother, Mother Dorothy. To say "thank you" to a community which has spoken words to God of supplication for me on my journey to the priesthood. To say "thank you" to the witness that you as a community are in Ontario, and I am confident of the even greater witness that you will become as you continue to grow and as you live out ever more fully the charism of teaching that is at the heart of your mission as more sisters complete their studies and move into the schools of Ontario.

As we continue with our Eucharistic celebration, this great expression of gratitude to God for all He has done for us... for the beauty of creation... for the beautiful vocations He has given us... and as you prepare to intimately encounter Jesus as His consecrated brides in the Eucharist, let us be ever further resolved to be His courageous witnesses in the world. Knowing that as we do so, that no matter how outnumbered we may feel by the culture, we are not alone. Rather, let us have confidence that our Triune God is there to support us; [that your spouse Jesus is prepared to protect & defend you as you love Him and make Him known in the world]; and that through His Holy Spirit, we have everything we need at our disposal to live out the line from today's Psalm:

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth.