

Homily For Tuesday of the 15th Week of Ordinary Time - Year II

St Peter's 8:30 AM Mass – July 12, 2022

Isaiah 7:1-9 "If you do not stand firm in faith, you will not stand at all."

Psalms 48:1-8 "Within Mount Zion, God has shown himself a sure defence."

Matt 11:20-24 "Jesus reproached the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done."

Stand Firm In Your Faith

Introduction

One is not supposed to be distracted at mass, but I have to admit I sometimes look around. I love to notice how all the nations and races of the world are here. In that sense, we are truly what we say about ourselves. We are the Holy Catholic Church. Catholic means universal. It means everybody. In Christ, all the peoples of the world are one. That's our heritage. That's the faith that we are proud to profess.

Different cultures have their ways of telling stories. Hebrew storytelling, like what we have in the Sacred Scriptures, has some very different elements than what we are used to in modern movies, books, etc. It can be challenging for us to understand what's going on. That's my excuse for having needed about five times through this passage from Isaiah to begin to get the picture.

Isaiah

The story is not just about good guys and bad guys and who is going to win. It is always about how God works out His great plan of salvation. Who will trust in that plan and who will place themselves outside of it? At this point in the story, God's chosen people have long been split in two. They are like brothers, sometimes getting along and sometimes fighting bitterly. Today's passage describes how one of the brothers seems to have joined a gang, seriously disturbing the balance of power between them.

The names of the players seem strange. The northern kingdom is called Israel but is sometimes called Ephraim in Scripture, which is the name of one of the ten

Israelite tribes which split away after Solomon died. Their king is Pekah. He has made an alliance with the king of Aram, which is really the expanding empire of Assyria. Together, they plan to attack the southern kingdom, called Judah, which is the name of the largest of the two southern tribes. Their king is Ahaz, who is in the line of the great King David, from which will come God's Messiah.

Unfortunately, King Ahaz had long stopped trusting in God, and has led people into abandoning worship of God. That is the exact reason that, when he hears about the alliance against him, he is terrified, like a leaf shaking in the wind. Most telling in the story, all the people are also terrified. That is the storyteller's way of saying that the nation as a whole has turned away from God. This should sound familiar to us in a culture which is in the process of doing the same.

Now we have an entirely different second aspect of the story, also with three actors, very different. God sends the prophet Isaiah to King Ahaz. God tells him not to be afraid. God's promise of the messiah from his line will be true. Don't let your courage and trust in the Lord fail. Faith is measured by trust in the Lord. There is a play on words in the Hebrew. The best way to translate it is that, unless your faith is firm, then your life shall not be firm.

One scholar puts it like this: Trust or bust. That is still the message for us. Does it seem like we have enemies all around us? Stay calm. Do not be afraid. Only trust in God. The wind will not shake you. Isaiah will scold Ahaz for his lack of trust in God's promise. Then he will make the famous prophecy, not in today's passage, that a virgin will give birth to a son, who will be Emmanuel, God with us. That's the plan.

Matthew

This passage is put together with Jesus scolding the people of God with whom he has been walking and healing. Three Galilean towns are within walking distance. Jesus and his followers did just that. They walked around Chorazin, Bethsaida, and especially Capernaum, where Jesus lived during his ministry. They saw his deeds of power but, except for a few, did not turn back to God. For this, Jesus calls down

a humiliating condemnation. He speaks to them like the prophets of old: Woe to you for your lack of trust.

It would have been quite a shock to be compared unfavourably to Tyre and Sidon, two Phoenician cities already under judgment. Jesus knows they would have mourned their sins and put on sackcloth and ashes if they had seen the deeds of power. Even Capernaum, where Jesus chose to live, is in that same danger of being humiliated, more even than the depraved city of Sodom.

Call To Action

We see it everywhere in our cultural storytelling. Just be optimistic and you will be fine. St. Josemaria Escriva says that "Christian optimism is not mere human confidence that everything will turn out all right. It is a sure knowledge of the power of grace. This optimism leads us to make demands on ourselves, to struggle to respond at every moment to God's call." The Catechism of the Catholic Church declares: "The human heart is heavy and hardened. God must give man a new heart."

That new heart is a strength based on our trust. Do we find ourselves easily made anxious? If Christ is truly present among us: in his Word, in his Eucharist, and in his Church, then we are in a situation much like that of ancient Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum as they witnessed his ministry.

We have already seen how fragile is our contemporary greatness. We can lose our freedoms in a very short time. We can lose our beloved technology without warning, which happened last week. We must not count on the greatness of our cities, our civilizations, to save us from judgment. It is repentance alone that will save us. On a personal level, we must find areas in our lives that are not fully surrendered to the lordship of Jesus. We will not stand firm unless our faith is firm. Let us not miss this moment. To us whom much has been given, much will be required.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *Arise, O God, defend your cause. Forget not the cries of those who seek you.*

Collect: *Almighty God, whom we dare to call our Father, bring to perfection in our hearts the spirit of sons and daughters, that we may enter into the inheritance which you have promised.*

Isaiah: *In the days of King Ahaz of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah of Israel went to attack Jerusalem. When the house of David heard that Aram had allied with Ephraim, the heart of Ahaz and of his people shook as trees in the wind. Then the Lord said to Isaiah: "Go to Ahaz and say: Take heed, be quiet and do not let your heart be faint. Aram and Ephraim have plotted to go up against Jerusalem and conquer it. This shall not come to pass. Ephraim will be shattered within sixty-five years. If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all.*

Psalms: *Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God. His holy mountain is the joy of all the earth. Within the citadels of Mount Zion God has shown himself a sure defence. The kings assembled but trembling took hold of them.*

Matthew: *Jesus reproached the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done. Woe to you, Chorazin and Bethsaida! If the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for them than for you. And you Capernaum, will be brought down, for if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. On the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for you.*