

Homily For Tuesday of the 9th Week of Ordinary Time - Year I

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - June 1, 2021

Tobit 9:14-3:1 "Where are the righteous deeds that you are known for?"

Psalms 112:1-9 "They have distributed freely. They have given to the poor. Their righteousness endures."

Mark 12:13-17 "Jesus said: Give to the emperor what is his, and to God the things that are God's."

Defense of Our Faith

Introduction

Justin Martyr was born and lived early in the second century. That's so close to the time of Christ, only 70 years after the death of Jesus. That's only one lifetime later. In fact, when he was born, around the year 100, very likely John, the Apostle, the 'beloved disciple', who heard Jesus say from the cross, "behold your mother," was either still alive, or had only recently died.

You know how old ideas don't have so much credibility in the modern world because we tend to think that the more recent the idea, the more value it has. But, the teaching of someone like Justin Martyr is incredibly important to us **because** it is so early. It tells us how believers understood Christ right from the beginning.

Justin the Apologist

Justin Martyr, whom we honour today, was an apologist. We even still have two of his 'apologias' or 'apologies'. Now this does not mean that Justin apologized for the faith. He didn't go around saying to people: "I'm so sorry I am a Christian." In fact, it's the opposite. An apology is a defense of the Christian faith. It is a reasoned and rational explanation or argument for the truth of Jesus Christ, and faith in him as the resurrected Son of God.

Justin the Martyr

Justin Martyr was also a **martyr**. Martyr is not his last name. It is his entry into the kingdom of God. He and his companions were killed because they were

Christians. Notice how early this new faith had come to the attention of Rome. Like Jesus, executed by the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, they were killed because they refused to compromise on the truth of God. Like Jesus, they were totally law abiding citizens, no threat to the governing Romans, yet killed because they had come to recognize that nothing they could do or have in this world has the abiding value of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Mark

The Pharisees and Herodians, who hated each other, got together to trap Jesus. Unlike the martyrs, they began by flattering him with words they did not believe themselves: "We know that you teach the way of God in accordance with truth." But listen to Justin says to the Roman ruler when his life was on the line: "We have come, not to flatter you by this writing, nor please you by our address ... You can kill, but you cannot hurt us."

Those Christians had a crystal clear understanding of what was worth living for and what was worth dying for. Jesus himself gave us that clarity. Those who came to accuse Jesus had two things muddled together i.e. How to do what was required under the civil law of the ruling Romans while still obeying the commandments of God.

Listen to Justin Martyr: "And everywhere we, more readily than all other people, endeavour to pay to those appointed by you the taxes both ordinary and extraordinary, as we have been taught by him; for at that time some came to Him and asked him if one ought to pay tribute to Cæsar; and He answered, "Tell me, whose image does the coin bear? And they said, Cæsar's. And again he answered them, render therefore to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's. And so to God alone we render worship, but in other things we gladly serve you, acknowledging you as kings and rulers of men."

Justin uses today's Gospel passage in his apology, and so must we. Here is the coin of the realm. God doesn't want that, so give it to the emperor. God does want your heart, so give that to him. It's almost that simple.

Tobit

All this week, the first reading is from the book of Tobit. What an inspiring part of God's word. Tobit is righteous and faithful. Like us, though, he loses his way when life takes a horrible turn. Like Justin Martyr, Tobit had put his life at risk by doing works of justice, including burying those who had been killed for their faith.

However, it seems that Tobit has not observed a useful worldly wisdom - Don't let birds poop in your eyes. Personally, I am quite conscious of this when I look up in the sky. Tobit becomes blind. And, a lot like the woman who just wanted to touch the hem of Jesus' robe, the doctors could not help. In fact, they made his condition worse. In his frustration and discouragement, Tobit calls his wife a liar. But with what wonderful wisdom Anna challenges him: "You, who have done so many good deeds, where is your righteousness now when you accuse me?"

In a way, Tobit's accusation of his wife is the same as the accusation of the Roman ruler against the Christians. It is false. The difference is that Tobit immediately recognizes the falseness in his own heart: "Then with much grief and anguish of heart, he wept and, with groaning, began to pray. " The truth of God must turn us towards him in our prayer and grief at our own wrongdoing. Our lives must be evidence of Jesus Christ crucified and raised again on the third day.

Call To Action

Psalm 112 today celebrates the righteous person who imitates God in showing mercy and care for the poor, one who delights in God's law. This one will not be afraid of 'evil tidings', it says. A better translation for us is that this person will not be afraid of 'bad news'. We never get bad news do we? Why is the psalmist not afraid of bad news? Because he trusts in the Lord.

Today, you and I are asked again to give our apology for Jesus Christ. Live a righteous life and there is no need to be afraid, trusting him at all times, even when we hear bad news, and even when we are accused by the world around us. Shall we do 2000 years after Christ what Justin did only 100 years after?

Shall we give to the emperors of this world what belongs to them, but give to God what is God's. And what do we have that belongs to God? All the love songs tell us over and over again: It's our hearts.

I will give the last word to the saint we honour today: "It is in our power, when we are examined, to deny that we are Christians; but we would not live by telling a lie. For, impelled by the desire of the eternal and pure life, we seek the home that is with God, the Father and Creator of all." We hasten to confess our faith, no matter what the consequence. We are not afraid.

Key Scripture Passages

Collect: *O God, who through the folly of the cross wondrously taught St Justin the Martyr the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ, grant that we may become steadfast in the faith.*

Tobit: *I, Tobit, tired from burying the dead, slept by the wall with my face uncovered. Sparrows' droppings fell into my eyes and produced white films. I went to physicians to be healed, but the more they treated me with ointments the more my vision was obscured until I became completely blind. My wife, Anna, earned money as a weaver. She cut off a piece she had woven and sent it to the owners. They paid her full wages and also gave her a young goat for a meal. I called her and said, "Where did you get this goat?" She said to me, "It was given to me as a gift in addition to my wages." But I did not believe her, and told her to return it to the owners. I became flushed with anger against her over this. Then she replied to me, "Where are your acts of charity? Where are your righteous deeds that you are known for?" Then with much grief and anguish of heart, I wept and, with groaning, began to pray.*

Psalm: *Happy are those who fear the Lord, who greatly delight in his commandments ... They have distributed freely. They have given to the poor. Their righteousness endures.*

Gospel Acclamation: *May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our heart, that we might see how great is the hope to which we are called.*

Mark: *Some Pharisees and Herodians were sent to Jesus to trap him in what he said. "Teacher, we know that you teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not?" But, knowing their hypocrisy, Jesus said to them, "Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius ... Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's." Jesus said to them, "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were utterly amazed at him.*

Justin Martyr: *Justin was of pagan Greek origin, born in Samaria about the year 100. Converting to Christianity, Justin was a persuasive apologist. Denounced to the authorities, he and his companions were brought to trial. Court records reveal how they refused to sacrifice to the gods. They were condemned to death and martyred about the year 165.*