

Praise In Suffering

In our first reading today we hear of the amazing story of the three young men praising God in their sufferings.

The Jewish people had been exiled from Jerusalem in 587 BC and now they were living in Babylon. Shadrach, Mesach and Abednego were Jews who became prominent in the Babylonian court and in good favor with King Nebuchadnezzar. However, in Babylon, whenever you heard the sound of trumpets or flutes or bagpipes you were supposed to bow down to serve the god of the King and worship the statue.

But Shadrach, Mesach and Abednego would not do it. They would not worship the statue and the false god. So the King is pissed and he is threatening to throw them into the white hot furnace if they do not comply. He also begins mocking them saying, "Yea you believe in this God of yours? Well where is this God of yours going to be when I cast you into that white hot furnace? Is he going to save you?"

Sometimes, it seems as if the world is saying the same thing to us. "Yea you guys believe in this God of Love? Look at your Church. It is such a mess, people are leaving the Church. There is so much evil in the world. How you can believe in such a silly God?"

Yet listen to these profound words for the three young men, a response which should also cry out from our hearts in response to the world.

"There is no need for us to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If our God whom we serve can save us from the white hot furnace and from your hands, O King may he save us"

Notice how he responds. IF. IF God wants to save us from this fire, if it is his will to save us from this white hot furnace, then may he save us. The three young men are open to the possibility that God may not save them from the fire. Yet this is not a sign of defeat but a sign of their faithfulness and trust.

Listen to what they say next: "But even if he will not, know O King, that we will not serve your god or worship the golden statue that you set up."

These are beautiful words because they are saying that even if it seems like God has abandoned us, we will not abandon him! We know that he is faithful and even when it seems like suffering has won, we know that our God will arise victorious!

This is remarkable faith. This is remarkable trust and what is more amazing is that the psalm we had just read actually comes from the book of Daniel. After the King has thrown them into the white hot furnace, they praise the Lord. They sing a psalm of praise. "Blessed is your holy and glorious name, praiseworthy and exalted above all for all ages."

Praising God in the suffering. This is remarkable faith because there are pointing to its fulfillment: Jesus Christ on the cross, the one who was mocked just like these three men were: "Yea you say you are the Son of God and he is your Father? Well show us! Come off that cross if you can, if God is really watching over you."

But just like the three young men, what does Jesus do? He praises God in his suffering. When Jesus says, "My God my God, why have you forsaken me?", he is quoting the title of Psalm 22 and in psalm 22 there is this passage:

I will tell of thy name to my brethren;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee:

²⁴ For he has not despised or abhorred
the affliction of the afflicted.

As we get closer to Holy Week, let us reignite our fervor for our Lenten penances and praise him in our sufferings because we know that our God is faithful and that he will never abandon us. As we look forward to his Resurrection, it is a sign and reminder that he is always victorious as the prayer of Azariah (before he goes into the furnace) reminds us:

Yet with contrite heart and humble spirit may we be accepted, as though it were with burnt offerings of rams and bulls...
such may our sacrifice be in your sight this day...
for there is no shame for those who trust in you.