

In Name and in Truth

Vietnam first received the Catholic faith in the early 17th century from Portuguese missionaries, but by the 19th century there were three major persecutions which resulted in the death of 100 000 to 300 000 Catholics. In order to avoid death, the Vietnamese people were given the option of rejecting their faith by stepping on a wooden cross. These 117 martyrs Andrew Dung Lac and companions who represent those thousands of martyrs decided not to renounce our Lord by trampling on a wooden cross, but instead they took up their cross and gave concrete proof to their identity as Christians with their own blood through beheadings or tortures. This exact moment right here, right now would not be happening if it were not for their faith; I stand, in addition to many of my Vietnamese brothers and sisters, as a testimony to their faithfulness to the Lord which in turn has been faithfully passed down through many, many generations; I stand as a testimony to the words of the Lord: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." The fruit of my vocation and even my faith exists because these 117 martyrs died for their faith. Their witness reminds and challenges us today to be worthy children of God in name and in truth because our faithfulness or unfaithfulness will effect others.

Jesus has some very strong words in the Gospel today for those who professed to be children of God in name but not in truth. When Jesus accuses the Pharisees and the Jewish people of turning the temple into "a den of robbers", he is referring back to Jer 7 who prophesied the destruction of the temple in 587 BC because of the sins of the people. Six hundred years before the time of Jesus, the Jewish people believed that they were impervious to any attacks from foreign enemies because the presence of God dwelt among them in the temple. This was true—if they remained faithful. However, they believed that God would still protect them even though they committed murder, adultery, worshipped false gods. They identified themselves as children of God in name but not in truth.

Jeremiah conveyed this message from God to Judea:

"Will you ... come and stand before me in this house...and say, 'We are delivered!'—only to go on doing all these abominations? ¹¹Has this house... become a den of robbers in your eyes?" (Jer 7:9-11).

The people did not change and the temple was destroyed in 587 BC and the captives were led into exile.

The Lord was urging the Jews of his time and us to repent and become children of God in name and in truth. Although we may not commit murder, do we have a destructive anger in our hearts which leads to murder? Although we do not commit adultery, do we look or think with lust and thereby commit adultery in the heart? Although we do not worship golden calves or idols, do we worship the gods of money, social media, and sports? The Lord desires a transformation that encapsulates our external actions and the internal desires of our hearts.

We all have our own struggles with the faith and the Lord knows we are not perfect. But there is a difference between fighting off the temptations from the sanctuary of our heart and making alliances with our temptations by inviting them in. And we can only be faithful by grace and especially through the graces of this mass.

Just as Judas Maccabeus overcame the 60 000 enemy soldiers seeking to destroy the Jewish people with his 10 000 men by remaining faithful to the Lord and relying on God's strength, so the power of the Lord kept Andrew Dung Lac and companions faithful to the Cross and became children both in name and

truth. Consequently, just as the temple was rededicated to the Lord after it had been defiled and ruined, so the faithful Vietnamese martyrs whose bodies had been decapitated and tortured await the resurrection of the body where the temples of their bodies will be united with their souls to offer perfect worship to God. Truly their houses are houses of prayer in which they have dedicated the temples of their bodies for the worship of God rather than the worship of foreign gods.

Who knew that the faithfulness of thousands of men and women 200 years ago in Vietnam would extend to the furthest bounds of the world—even to a chilly city in Canada where I and many others stand as the fruit of their labors. It is certain that we will have a profound impact on many generations to come, but will our impact be the result of a faithfulness in name and in truth by the grace of God like the Vietnamese martyrs or an unfaithfulness to the truth of our identity like the people of Jesus' time?