

Homily for April 6 2019

The Sanford Hotel in San Francisco reports that it never lost a single Bible in the 15 years it placed them at the bedside as a service to the guests. But, in one month after it started putting dictionaries in the rooms as well, 41 dictionaries disappeared. Now, I don't know whether you can draw a solid conclusion from that, but on the surface, it seems obvious that persons apparently place a greater value on human words than they do the Word of God. Of course, it could also be that they thought stealing a Bible was more serious than taking Webster's Dictionary.

So, there are words and The Word. Of course, the Bible is the Word above all other words. But we go even further than that in the Christian faith. Jesus is the Word the Word become flesh and by the Word that He is, we assess all other words.

As well, because Jesus is the word made flesh he has always used others to incarnate his word, that is bring it to life. Those who are God's prophets, like Jeremiah, know how hard it is for us humans to really hear God's word. Repeatedly he cried out in anguish, as we hear from today's reading. He used compelling and persuasive speech to convey to the people the Word God had made known to him. And yet the people's response?

*Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the;
land of the living, so that his name will no longer be remembered.*

Repeatedly Jeremiah called the people to open their ears and hearts to a life of repentance and so conform their lives to God's covenant. But rather than his words being met with open hearts, they were met with stony hearts. Jeremiah anticipates the one who is the Word in the Flesh, Jesus Christ when he says of himself:

*But I was like a gentle lamb
led to the slaughter.
And I did not know it was against me
that they devised schemes, saying,*

If hearts are closed to the Word, they will respond at best with indifference and at worst with violence. This is what our Lord knew first hand. In today's Gospel, his word is met with indifference by some, interest by others, opposition by those who are out to arrest him. And then there were those who said:

“Never has anyone spoken like this”

This is the wonderful thing about this Word, Jesus. He is living and alive. Although the people of Jeremiah's time wanted to shut him up so that his name would no longer be remembered, here we are 2600 years later reading his words. Although Jesus was led like a lamb to be slaughtered, no words have been read more, written and spoken about more than his words. Not to mention how these words of been depicted in art, sculpture and music.

Because while it is true that for some Jesus' words illicit an indifferent, negative or violent reaction, in those who say: "never has anyone spoken like this", they are life changing words.

Those who are turning their hearts and minds ever more to this living word can agree with these words from the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

The Christian faith is not a "religion of the book." Christianity is the religion of the "Word" of God, a word which is "not a written and mute word, but the Word which is incarnate and living." If the Scriptures are not to remain a dead letter, Christ, the eternal Word of the living God, must, through the Holy Spirit, "open [our] minds to understand the Scriptures.

Stony hearts cannot hear this word. But only those kind of hearts, that a later Prophet Ezekiel, anticipated when he said:

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

As we continue on this Lenten journey may we pray for an even greater receptivity to the living word of God. While we would never want to steal the Bible from Sandford Hotel or any other for that matter, may there be many times we will steal away to read its most important and life giving words.