

Homily for February 6th

St. Paul Miki and the Japanese Martyrs

In today's collect we make the supplication:

grant, we pray, that by their intercession, we may hold with courage even until death to the faith that we profess.

"That by their intercession" refers to the Japanese martyrs we honour this day. I will return to them at the end of the homily.

What does it mean to hold with courage, even until death the faith we profess? The word courage comes from the Latin root "cor" meaning heart. The heart is the place of our innermost feelings and the centre of our will. Just as we need to exercise physical muscle so that it will remain strong, so too with the heart. Courage is spiritual heart muscle.

Our Old Testament reading for this evening gives insight into how we can exercise our hearts and so be courageous.

Courage is formed in the lives of those who are humble. The word humble comes from the Latin root "humus" meaning of the earth. People who are humble know we are creatures living daily in the sight of our heavenly creator. Solomon in our first reading speaks to the Lord with a humble heart as we listen into his prayer of dedication of the Jerusalem Temple:

"O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing mercy to your servants who walk before you with all their heart.

There is that word "heart" again. When we can affirm and know that there is no God like the Lord, and we more fully perceive his faithfulness, we respond in kind by desiring to walk before the Lord with our whole heart.

To be humble is to acknowledge our deep dependence upon God and to know at the core of our being we are but little children so in need of our heavenly Father's direction. From a place of such humility, we with Solomon pray:

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house which I have built!

Solomon understood that the Temple could not contain the glory of God. However, Solomon also understood something the Lord would say through Isaiah some 500 years after Solomon:

For thus says the high and lofty One

**who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
 "I dwell in the high and holy place,
 and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit,
 to revive the spirit of the humble,**

The spirit of the humble is captured in these words of David's son. Notice the intensity of his cry:

Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, O LORD my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; 29 that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. 30 Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive.

Today the Church invites us to remember the Japanese Martyr St. Paul Miki and 26 companions who were martyred on what is now known as the Holy Mountain, overlooking Nagasaki. It was February 6th, 1597. As St. Paul, a Jesuit brother, was dying by crucifixion he preached to his executioners a courageous sermon filled with humility. Accused of being a foreigner who had come to Japan with this unacceptable proclamation, from the Cross St. Paul Miki declared:

"The sentence of judgment says these men came to Japan from the Philippines, but I did not come from any other country. I am a true Japanese. The only reason for my being killed is that I have taught the doctrine of Christ. I certainly did teach the doctrine of Christ. I thank God it is for this reason I die. I believe that I am telling only the truth before I die. I know you believe me and I want to say to you all once again: Ask Christ to help you to become happy. I obey Christ. After Christ's example I forgive my persecutors. I do not hate them. I ask God to have pity on all, and I hope my blood will fall on my fellow men as a fruitful rain."

Such humility illustrates how this Jesuit martyr was a man filled with courage. The Father heard his prayer from heaven and dwelt deeply in the heart of this humble man.

St Paul Miki pray for us that we may hold with courage even until death, the faith we profess.