

Homily for February 9, 2019

In paragraph 160 of the Catechism the Church teaches:

To be human, “man’s response to God by faith must be free, and ... therefore nobody is to be forced to embrace the faith against his will. The act of faith is of its very nature a free act.” “God calls men to serve him in spirit and in truth. Consequently they are bound to him in conscience, but not coerced.... This fact received its fullest manifestation in Christ Jesus.”

Our conscience is the most intimate dimension of our human person and is aligned very closely with our soul. When we look to Jesus we see repeatedly that he always invited people to faith and conversion, but never coerced them. Again quoting the Catechism:

“For he bore witness to the truth but refused to use force to impose it on those who spoke against it. His kingdom ... grows by the love with which Christ, lifted up on the cross, draws men to himself.”¹

St. Peter’s as the local manifestation of Jesus’ presence in Silver Springs is to always witness to the truth as we point to Christ crucified and thereby draw people to himself. This is because as we heard in today’s Gospel Jesus looks upon all people with loving compassion. As he alighted the shore of the Sea of Galilee Mark tells us:

Jesus saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.²

When Jesus sees people who do not know him notice his reaction. He has compassion for them. This word compassion is used in three parables of Jesus. In Mt. 18:27 the lord has pity on the servant and owes him an unpayable sum, in Lk. 15:20 the father has compassion on the prodigal, and in Lk. 10:33 the Samaritan has compassion on the man who has fallen among thieves. In all these instances the term reflects the totality of the divine mercy to which human compassion is a proper response. In Mark’s Gospel the verb is used four times and Jesus is always the subject. For instance Jesus who shows compassion in Mk. 1:42 when in seeing a leper we are told: “Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him”³.

In the verse we are considering today, Jesus is moved with pity for this large crowd for they are like sheep without a shepherd. Now think about this image with me. What will happen to shepherd-less sheep? They will wander every which way and will be easy prey for ravenous predators. So too with people, left to their own devices. So Jesus comes and teaches, so wanting

¹ Catholic Church. (2000). [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) (2nd Ed., p. 44). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mk 6:34). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

³ [*The Holy Bible*](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Mk 1:41). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

to touch the minds and hearts of people so as to inspire their consciences to respond to Him in faith.

It is this compassion and pity that is to characterize our attitude towards the crowd that is all around us so that St. Peter's as a community of genuine compassion and welcome, where the freedom of each person is respected as we purposefully and intentionally bear witness to the great shepherd of the sheep Jesus, inviting people to draw close to him.

May Mary, whose freedom was perfectly aligned to the Saviour pray for us, that our collective heart will embody the compassion of Jesus and so emulate the Good Shepherd this and every day.