

Homily for the Feast of St. Justin Martyr
June 1, 2022

Sanctified in the Truth

Today is the memorial of Saint Justin, Martyr. Saint Justin was born in Palestine around the beginning of the 2nd century. He was educated in Greek thought and studied the preeminent philosophies of his day, a true eclectic. Despite these pagan influences, he came to believe God's message was embodied in Christian teachings and his conversion account describes that Christian moral beauty and truth brought him to Christ.

So it is significant that in today's Gospel Jesus speaks of the Apostles in his prayer to the Father of being 'sanctified in the truth'. What does this mean?

To be sanctified is to be made holy. Think of the prayer we pray, called in Latin the Sanctus. “

“Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts”

This prayer taken from the 4th chapter of the Book of Revelation is declaring that God is holy. For those who like Justin Martyr are sanctified in the truth means that they are being made holy in the Holy One, the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice that in the prayer Jesus recognizes that he will be coming to the Father but the Apostles will remain in the world. But he affirms that although they are in the world they do not belong to the world, they belong to Jesus. However, as St Paul says in the reading from Acts, we have to be always on our guard for those, who even in the Church, will distort the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them.

Here is something that we have to be always attentive to. The influence of the world will seek to attack the Church from without and disrupt it from within. From without there will be those who will try to discredit and in some cases seek to destroy the Church. Think for instance how the media is repeatedly trying to discredit the Church with negative press. From within there will be those who will try to use their position, not to serve Jesus and His people, but to be self-serving and adversely influence those within the community of the faithful. Think of the various scandals that of rocked the faithful and scattered many who no longer want to associate with the Church,

This is where today's saint can be an encouragement to us. He lived at a time where the Church was being violently suppressed from without and heresy and those with self-serving motives were influencing the Church from within.

Justin came to see in Jesus Christ the one who sanctified him in the truth and like St. Paul knew that when the Gospel is rightly proclaimed and the Church's shepherds live lives conformed to Jesus then the people of God will be commended to God and the message of his grace, as St. Paul states in today's Acts reading.

St. Justin so lived his life rooted in the relationship that was his in Christ that he could then face the world's rejection and remain a courageous witness to Jesus.

At his trial the Roman Prefect Rusticus asked: "You are a Christian, then?" Justin said: "Yes, I am a Christian." The prefect said to Justin: "You are called a learned man and think that you know what is true teaching. Listen: if you were scourged and beheaded, are you convinced that you would go up to heaven?" Justin said: "I hope that I shall enter God's house if I suffer that way. For I know that God's favor is stored up until the end of the whole world for all who have lived good lives."

The prefect Rusticus said: "Do you have an idea that you will go up to heaven to receive some suitable rewards?" Justin said: "It is not an idea that I have; it is something I know well and hold to be most certain."

The prefect Rusticus said: "Now let us come to the point at issue, which is necessary and urgent. Gather round then and with one accord offer sacrifice to the gods." Justin said: "No one who is right thinking stoops from true worship to false worship."

Remember Justin was a philosopher who had been a pagan but left falsehood behind when he discovered the power of the Gospel as expressed in today's readings.

St Justin, pray that we like you, in discovering the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ will always reject deception and error and become ever more steadfast in the Faith as we are sanctified in the truth.