

4th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Luke 4:21-30

We all want to be happy. The United States has gone so far as to ingrain the pursuit of happiness in its constitution. To some extent, we should avoid unhappiness and pursue happiness. Is it true that happiness is the same as success so that if I am unhappy I am unsuccessful? Is the pursuit of happiness a Christian ideal?

Apart from a translation of the Beatitudes or the Sermon on the Mount Christ did not speak of happiness but of joy; happiness is human but joy is holy. It's hard enough to be happy but to be holy seems near impossible and, for most of us, is it really our goal?

In the verses preceding this Gospel, the Gospel proclaimed last Sunday, Christ announces that the words of the prophet Isaiah that God would not abandon His people but would send a messiah and that that promise is now being fulfilled in Him are met in these verses by outrage and an attempt to kill Christ by throwing Him off a cliff. Why were the people so upset that the promise of the Messiah, for which they had long awaited, and that that Messiah was Jesus of Nazareth? They were upset because Jesus demanded holiness and holiness demands sacrifice and sacrifice can mean unhappiness. Rather than the joy in the fulfillment of the promise of God they felt unhappy because that fulfillment of God's promise demanded too much.

As Catholics, we have a choice to make everyday between happiness and holiness. To be happy means to remove from my life those people and things that upset me and cause me to feel unhappy. To be holy means to engage those people and things that upset me and to sacrifice myself, for the definition of sacrifice is to joyfully give up something good. Holiness demands courage. Courage is not the absence of fear but the recognition of fear and rising above

it. To be courageous is to go after that which is good and holy in spite of fear. God said to the prophet Jeremiah: "They will fight against you but not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you." That is why Christ can be called courageous, for He knew that the demands that He made on others for holiness against their desires for happiness would see Him embarrassed and shamed, ridiculed and tormented, and eventually killed.

We know that Christ felt fear for the night before His execution He sweated blood in the garden of Gethsemane. He feared what was natural for man to fear, death, but he faced it for the sake of what was right. So we must do as Christ did and as God said to Jeremiah: "[G]ird your loins; stand up and tell them all that I command you." How was it that in spite of the mob baying for His blood that Our Lord walked through the midst of them? In the middle of their anger and resentment and pride He walked through them because He could face them not with feelings of revenge but with courage. As the Lord said to Jeremiah: "Be not crushed on their account, as though I would leave you crushed before them."

Let us pray that in a world that demands we do what is popular, we have the courage do what is right.