

25th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Luke 16:1-13

We hear often that religion should be kept out of the public sphere because religion is a private matter and up to the conscience of the individual. Maybe you agree with this statement. The dangers of this, however, are often muted but noticeable if we pay attention.

The fact is that everyday life and religion do not always happily go hand-in-hand. We are often confronted by difficult situations, frustrating circumstances, embarrassing questions, and it can be easy to compromise what we know in faith to be right but what we do actually. This is what it means to serve two masters, as the Lord says in the Gospel.

So how can I live my faith in my everyday life when the two so often do not seem to go together? Let us think of how the Lord lived in His life on earth. Firstly, Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the Son of God. That is, He is God. And God chose to come down from Heaven and to live amongst us, sharing the same birth, the same childhood, the same adulthood, the same joys, the same pains, the same happiness, the same distress as we all do. So for us this means that God is not separated from our everyday lives, nor should we separate our everyday lives from God. We should not have our everyday life and our religion — they should be the same thing.

Following the French Revolution there came the Reign of Terror in which the Church was persecuted and, for all intents and purposes, outlawed. Priests were forced to denounce their priesthood or be imprisoned, churches were closed, and religious brothers and sisters, monks and nuns, forced to leave monasteries and convents. One such group were the sixteen Carmelite nuns of Compiègne who were ordered to leave the convent and take on so-called normal work. However, these women refused and so they were forcibly

removed from the convent. They were forbidden to live as a community or to wear the habit. So they dressed in ordinary clothes and lived separately but they still found ways to meet regularly to pray and to offer their sufferings as a sacrifice to Almighty God. Since they refused to abandon the faith and their way of life and to adopt a totally secular life in the “New France” they were arrested and condemned to death. They were loaded onto a cart and driven to the guillotine. Each one of these nuns moved to the executioner and placed her head on the chopping block, without any soldier having to force them. As they lay their heads down each one sang the *Salve Regina*, a hymn to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Instead of the usual frenzy of the crowds crying for blood and jeering at the prisoners there was silence and all that was heard was the sound of the hymn. The next day the terror was ended and the Church was restored.

These sixteen women made a choice between serving two masters; serving Christ as their master and so dying or serving a society without God and so living. There was no place for compromise.

Each one of us by virtue of our baptism is called to participate in the life of Christ and the mission of God. We each choose how to fulfill our baptism and to live our life as disciples of Christ. That choice must be lived without compromise. Of course, that is difficult for there are so many things that get in our way. The difficult thing for is to choose the right answer and to live it. That is why I must recognise that my own efforts are never enough and that I must seek, above all else, the grace of God through prayer, through the Sacrament of Penance, through the holy sacrifice of the Mass—for grace will build upon our nature and complete it and perfect it.

As we draw to a close Holy Cross Week and our parish celebrations, we should remember that we should live our lives at the foot of the Cross, standing there with the Blessed Virgin Mary, so that we may grow in holiness and so become devoted disciples of Our Lord. And that for us, there is no other way than that of the way of the Holy Cross.