

26th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Matthew 21:28-32

On the island of Sicily around the year A.D. 300 the Roman Emperors began a savage attack on the Church which demanded that all the holy writings of the Bible be destroyed. A young man, St. Euplus, had a great love of the Scriptures and would read the Gospels daily. Many others like him who loved the Holy Scriptures hid them away to protect them from destruction. St. Euplus, however, refused to hide them but went to the governor's palace, holding the Gospels under his arm, and turned himself in as a Christian. He was taken by the guards and thrown into prison and the Gospels destroyed. For three months he remained imprisoned and when after those months he was dragged again before the governor he refused to deny the faith but steadfastly held firm. He was asked if he still had copies of the Gospels with him. He said, "yes." When asked where they were so that they could be removed and destroyed he answered, "they are within me." He was taken away to be tortured and died by beheading.

St. Euplus believed that the faith cannot be hidden, even for the sake of protection, but must be boldly proclaimed. It is why at a time when Christianity was persecuted he handed himself over to the authorities to proclaim that he was a Christian. It is why he carried the Gospels with him even though he knew they would be destroyed. He made a stand in faith that very few could make because it demands tremendous courage but the stand that we can make is to not hide our faith, whether at school or at work or with family or with friends. However, two things can prevent us from taking the stand that we must. The first is apathy, and the second of discouragement.

As for discouragement, it often comes when we believe that there is little that we can do to effect change, and that is when we see our own limited

strength rather than the strength of God. Discouragement is a temptation of Satan that seeks to undermine our confidence in God and His grace. The fact is that we cannot rely on our own strength and we were not created to do so. We were created to rely on the strength of God and to co-operate with His grace. In the Gospel, the prostitutes and tax-collectors knew that by their own efforts they would never escape from slavery to sin, and they had every reason to be discouraged for they were rejected by the people and lived on the edge of society. But by the confession of their sins and by the grace of God they could change the entire orientation of their lives.

The Church has proclaimed for 2,000 years, and will do for the rest of time on earth, the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ. Those three things cannot be separated from one another but must be seen as a whole. The Passion and Death of Christ without the Resurrection would be akin to hopelessness and the Resurrection would never have come about without the Passion and Death. The Cross should be for us the great sign of the possibility of grace, that nothing is impossible to God. That just as Christ as He hung upon the Cross testified that He would not deny the truth, so what happened after the Cross testifies that God does not deny those who fight for the truth. So just as Christ as bold in bearing His Passion and death for our sakes, just as St. Euplus was bold in proclaiming the Gospel, so we must be bold in living the faith so that we may show enthusiasm against apathy give encouragement to the discouraged and so be transformed in Christ.