

Reflection on Matthew 10.24-39; 21-06-2020

Which command is repeated most often in the Bible?

You would think wouldn't you that it would be something stern and to the point like "Say your prayers", "worship God more wholeheartedly", or even "Give more money away".

But it's none of these! It is in fact words to the effect – "Do not be afraid" and it is found in verses 26, 28 and 31 of our Gospel reading this week.

Looking at this Gospel reading, it is full of quite descriptive and apocalyptic language and possibly the last place where we would expect to find the words "do not be afraid."

So, what is going on here?

In our reading, Jesus is explaining to his disciples the true cost of following Him. At that time, He was preaching quite revolutionary ideas and a new way of life to the people, thoughts and ways of life which people were not used to and at the root of them was the common theme: God's love for all His people under all circumstances and available to all His people, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Jesus was tackling an entrenched ideology in the Jewish hierarchy which was preventing, putting barriers in place, such that the Gentiles, and even some of the Jews themselves, did not have the access to or understanding to experience God's love through the Jewish faith.

So of course, Jesus had opposition from these quarters such that they plotted to kill him as in the end they did, with the unwilling help of the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate.

Here in our Gospel reading, Jesus is making it clear to his disciples that his mission to bring God's love to His people is going to face major opposition because His message went against the comfortable, entrenched order of the day, which cost both him, most of his disciples and a good many Christians throughout the centuries, including this present one, their lives.

But through all this, God would be alongside them in their physical suffering and they would be in His loving presence for all eternity.

So, what is the message for us today?

In this country we are very lucky to be able to worship in safety without fear of persecution. But in many countries of the world, a notable example being North

Korea, this possibility does not exist and any idea of church only happens underground.

But, and there's always a "but", we live in the midst of a very materialistic society and as Christians we have a very important message to proclaim – that of God's true love and concern for those less fortunate than ourselves and forgotten by society. Some people don't like this message as it challenges them in much the same way the Jewish authorities were challenged when they were criticised by Jesus, and they didn't like it either!

We are not being asked to give up our homes or our families in order to follow Christ, although in extreme cases this can happen and they are a gift to us from God, but we are being asked to make a stand when we see or hear of something which we encounter which goes against Christ's teaching, whether it be racism, or exploitation of the vulnerable or even problems in our own church communities causing an impaired Christian witness to a world so sorely in need of it. In the process of doing this, we may find opposition; we may find hostility which could be directed at us and even our families. Vitally though as always, we need to keep communicating with God through prayer, listening to His every word – His guidance. How does He want us to deal with the difficult situations in which we might find ourselves?

And so we come back to the message of this Gospel reading: "Do not be afraid". Believe me, we really have no need to be afraid because speaking from my own experiences, God will be alongside us in all that a hostile world can throw at us; He will be with us, supporting us, encouraging us - loving us – in this life as we do our best to do His will, ready for spending all eternity enfolded in His loving presence.