

Lent 4: Friday

John Paul II Pastoral Centre

16 March 2018

Today's Readings

Today's passage from the Book of Wisdom (Wis 2:1,12-22) reveals what the hearts of the wicked are like, of those who have distanced themselves from God. It also reveals their attitude toward the prophets, that they were even willing to persecute them. They are people who are well aware that they are dealing with a just man, so much so that the Scripture describes their thinking in this way: "Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions" (Wis 2:12).

In the face of the just man's goodness, they want to destroy him. Indeed, they cannot accept that there be a good man who reproaches them for their transgressions. The very presence of goodness they find oppressive – and they want to suppress it: "he – the righteous person – became to us a reproof of our thoughts; the very sight of him is a burden to us" (Wis 2:14).

Suspicion and hatred by the wicked describe how prophets – those out of line with accepted teaching and praxis – have been opposed and persecuted throughout the course of history: "Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected" (Wis 2:20). Scoffing and ridicule are the just person's lot.

I cannot but think of today's situation in our country which not only has decriminalized physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia but increasingly wants to force those who oppose these measures to be complicit in their crimes by compelling them to collaborate at the cost of losing their professional credentials.

It is not enough to let health-care workers turn against their oath to care for the sick with compassion, but there is also the desire to insist that everyone take part. The just person cannot be left to follow his or her conscience, as should be the case in any free society. They are resented for their goodness, and accordingly must be drawn into the net of evil by being forced to violate their conscience.

What the Book of Wisdom describes is our situation in Canada. And it marks a gradual, admittedly only a first, step towards totalitarianism, a State built on tyranny, one which cannot brook opposition. Actions which, until a couple of years ago were considered murder and criminal are not only decriminalized but are now in danger of being forced on persons and institutions against their conscience.

The recent attempt by the government to demand adherence to its policy on reproductive rights for those applying for federal money for summer jobs support is yet another attempt to enforce ideological conformity at the expense of freedom or remove themselves from the public square.

In the Gospel we see Jesus facing the same fate. The leaders of the people wanted to kill him. His goodness was a reproach to them. It made them look bad. As a tactic of opposition, they tried to whittle him down to size by claiming to know where he was from (cf. Jn 7:27) – the despised Galilee. But the irony is that they did not really know. Their hearts were hardened to the truth: that he had come from God, from the Father who sent him (cf. Jn 7:28).

It is always the same attitude when goodness shines out: people seek to disqualify the prophet or the just person in order to take away their authority.

There should then be no surprise when we meet obstacles in our efforts to unlock the depths of the heart and of conscience in the face of what is good, and true and beautiful. Misunderstanding and persecution are the result. History testifies then that “all the persons that the Holy Spirit chooses to speak the truth to the people of God suffer persecution.” Recall “the last of the Beatitudes of Jesus: blessed are you when you are persecuted in my name.”

This path has already been tread. It is the path of the Lord, the path of those who follow the Lord. But it is a path that always ends like the Lord’s, with a resurrection, but passing by way of the cross.

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