Freedom of Spirit

In being himself, in teaching the truth, in caring for those who were suffering, in caring out the Father’s mission, in liberating the captives, Jesus infuriated the Sadducees and the Pharisees. In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter and the other apostles are filled with the Spirit. There actions mirror Jesus’s. They heal the sick. They care for those in need. They preach the Good News. They gather people for the breaking of the bread. They call people to repentance. They baptize by the thousands and their numbers increase each day. In a short period of time, they have attracted over 5,000 to the way of Jesus Christ. And they too upset the powerful.

In today’s reading from the Acts of the Apostles (5:17-26), the Sadducees are filled with jealousy and they have the apostles thrown into public jail. The freedom of speech and freedom of religion which we cherish, were not so readily available to the apostles. The apostles, however, had a freedom of spirit. They knew that they were carrying on the mission that Christ had entrusted to them. They could see how lives were being transformed by the healing message of Christ and they were bold and courageous in carrying on the mission despite obstacles and setbacks. And, it didn’t hurt that “during the night, the angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison, led them out, and said, ‘Go and take your place in the temple area, and tell the people everything about this life’ ” (Acts 5:19-20) This all done in a manner in which the guards didn’t even realize that the apostles had been freed.

The Apostles were rounded up again, reminded that they had already been given one stern warning not to preach in the name of Jesus. And then after another stern warning, they were beaten and then released. The apostles are confident that they are doing the right thing, that they are following Christ and they are willing to accept the consequences.

“So they left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name. And all day long, both at the temple and in their homes, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the Messiah, Jesus” (Acts 5:41-42).

As we try to be faithful disciples of Christ, we should not be surprised if we elicit similar reactions. Jesus drew the ire of the Sadducees and Pharisees. Today’s reading shows similar treatment for the apostles. Why should things be significantly different for us? At times like these, it is helpful to recall a prayer popularized by Mother Teresa:

- People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.
- If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.
- If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway.
- If you are honest and sincere, people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.
- What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.
- If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway.
- The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.
- Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.
- In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

We think of Mother Teresa as a Saint who had all kinds of strength because God was with her day and night. But that is not the case for last 50 years of her public ministry. Once God had directed her to care for the poorest of the poor, He withdrew that closeness she had experienced earlier in her religious life. She knew the suffering Jesus on the cross who felt abandoned and she saw it all around her in the poor. She reached out to the poor, as Jesus reached out from the Cross. She met with much resistance, she loved anyway.

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1 prayerfoundation.org/mother_teresa_do_it_anyway.htm
3 catholiceducation.org/en/controversy/common-misconceptions/mother-teresas-darkness.html