

Pentecost A 2017 SML
AA 2:1-11; JN 20:19-23

"Stand Tall Fellow Catholics, Stand Tall"

The gospels for the past three weeks all share the same scene: the Upper Room, where each time, the air was thick with tension. Two weeks ago, the Gospel emphasized that Jesus taught at the table for three chapters about what was near and dear to His Sacred Heart. Just hours before his Passion would begin, Our Blessed Lord spoke about everything His disciples needed to know to survive His impending death, and life after his Ascension to the Father's right hand. One of the many things Our Blessed Lord taught the Apostles was an entire section on how much the Apostles would be hated. "If you belong to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you."

Last week's Gospel emphasized that after three chapters, Jesus stopped teaching, and while the air was still so thick with tension, Our Blessed Lord pushed back from the table, got up, walked out into the night air, raised His eyes to heaven, and began "to pray at the hour of his death."

This Sunday's Gospel again finds the Apostles in the Upper Room, where they hid for the last nine days, since Ascension Thursday, literally "scared to death," having seen what happened to their Blessed Lord first hand, namely, his passion and death, which they feared would happen to them. After all, the last time the Apostles were in the Upper Room with Our Blessed Lord, he plainly told them the world would hate them. For nine days, they hid and prayed. For nine days, they prayed the very first novena.

After nine days, their prayers were answered, as the Holy Spirit came with the sound of a strong driving wind and appeared as tongues of fire. The effect of the Holy Spirit was so great, that first Pentecost Sunday, crowds gathered at the sound of the wind. They were astounded and amazed because these uneducated fishermen, who hid for nine days and were afraid to so much as ask a question, now spoke in every language that was represented by that crowd. And they spoke authoritatively of the mighty acts of God. That first Pentecost was so spectacular an event because it was evident to the senses. They heard the strong driving wind. They saw the tongues of fire. And they proclaimed in languages not their own. Yet two verses after this evening's (morning's) first

reading ended, the unbelievers scoffed, "They're drunk." (AA 2:13)

Well if they were drunk, they would have eventually sobered up and returned to hiding in the Upper Room but they didn't. Instead, these uneducated fishermen took all that they had seen and heard in Jesus of Nazareth to all the nations, as commanded by Our Blessed Lord at his Ascension. And this they did so fearlessly, and all but one were martyred because of it. Before the Descent of the Holy Spirit, they were scared to death, and as it turned out, what they feared came true for 10 out of 11 of them, but the difference was, they were not afraid to die:

1. Matthew preached in Judea, Ethiopia, Persia and Parthia, and suffered martyrdom by the sword;
2. Peter, who preached in Asia Minor, the Western Mediterranean and as far as Great Britain, was crucified at Rome on an inverted cross;
3. James, the son of Zebedee, who preached in Spain, and was the first Apostle to die by the sword at Jerusalem;
4. James the Less and son of Alphaeus, was thrown from a pinnacle of the temple and then stoned to death below;
5. Philip preached in Phrygia, and suffered martyrdom by crucifixion;

6. Bartholemew, also known as Nathaniel, preached in Ethiopia, India, Persia and Armenia where he was flayed alive and beheaded;
7. Andrew preached in northern Greece, Epirus and Scythia, was bound to an X shaped cross, and he preached to his persecutors until he died;
8. Thomas, who preached in India, was speared to death;
9. Jude preached in Persia and Mesopotamia was stoned to death;
10. Simon, who preached in the Middle East and Africa, was sawed in two;
11. and John the Beloved, who preached at Ephesus, was exiled for his faith, but died of old age.

It is very likely when these things happened, the Apostles recalled the words of Our Blessed Lord at the Last Supper, "Because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you." So they were no longer afraid to die for their faith. I suspect they expected to die for their faith.

Catholic Bashing has become so commonplace. People slam the Catholic Church and no one is to say a word in her defense, but a British teacher faced 40 lashes for letting her

class of 7 year olds name the class teddy bear their favorite name - "Mohammad," and Muslim leaders called for death threats after Mohammad cartoons were published in a Danish newspaper. If I only had a dime for every time there was a cartoon drawn and a caption written regarding Our Blessed Lord, we wouldn't need a capital campaign.

I often get asked why is Catholic bashing acceptable? My answer is Catholic bashing is not acceptable, but it is to be expected, because Our Blessed Lord predicted it; because the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit since that first Pentecost Sunday almost 2000 years ago, does not stand as part of the world, because she's not. The Catholic Church is different, and because she's different, people will find the imperfections, or fault her virtue, and hold on to them, not let them go, and hate her and bash her. When the Church is bashed because the Church is hated, stand tall, fellow Catholics. Stand tall.

1. Our church is made up of every race. We are young and old, rich and poor, men and women, sinners and saints.
2. Our church has spanned the centuries . . . and the globe.
3. With God's grace, we started hospitals to care for the sick. We establish orphanages, and help the poor. We are the largest charitable organization on the planet, bringing relief and comfort to those in need.

4. We educate more children than any other scholarly or religious institution. We developed the scientific method and laws of evidence. We founded the college system.
5. We defend the dignity of all human life and uphold marriage and family.
6. Cities like St. Paul, St. Louis and San Antonio were named after our revered saints who navigated a sacred path before us.
7. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Catholic Church compiled the Bible. We are transformed by sacred scripture and sacred Tradition, which have consistently guided us for 2,000 years.
8. We are the Catholic Church, over one billion in our family, sharing in the sacraments and fullness of Christian faith.
9. For centuries, we have prayed for the world, every hour of the day, whenever Mass is celebrated. Jesus, himself, laid the foundation for our faith when he said to Peter, the first pope, "You are rock, and upon this rock I will build my Church."
10. For 2,000 years, we have had an unbroken line of shepherds guiding the Catholic Church with love and truth, in a confused and hurting world.
11. And in this world filled with chaos, hardship and pain, it's comforting to know that some things remain consistent, true

and strong – our Catholic faith, and the eternal love God has for all creation.

12. Ours is one family united in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

So when the Church is bashed because the Church is hated, remember it was predicted by Our Blessed Lord on Holy Thursday night. "If you belong to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you."

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