

Living the Spirit Christians?

Let me begin this writing by sharing with you the Reading from the Wednesday of the Fifth week of Easter. It is from an ancient source and is titled: *From a letter to Diognetus*.

“Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or custom. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow outlandish way of life. Their teaching is not based upon reveries inspired by the curiosity of me. Unlike some other people they champion no purely human doctrine. With regard to their dress, food and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in, whether it is Greek or foreign.

And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under all the disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country. Like others, they marry and have children, but they do not expose them. They share their meals, but not their wives. They live in the flesh, but they are not governed by the desires of the flesh. They pass their days upon earth, but they are citizens of heaven. Obedient to the laws, they yet live on a level that transcends the law.

Christians love all men, but men persecute them. Condemned because they are not understood, they are put to death, but raised to life again. They live in poverty, but enrich many; they are totally destitute, but possess an abundance of everything. They suffer dishonor, but that is their glory. They are defamed but vindicated. A blessing is their answer to abuse, deference their response to insult. For the good they do they receive the punishment of malefactors, but even then they rejoice, as though receiving the gift of life. They are attacked by the Jews as aliens, they are persecuted by the Greeks, yet no one can explain the reason for this hatred.

To speak in general terms, what the Christian is to the world what the soul is to the body. As the soul is present in every part of the body, but distinct from it, so Christians are found in all cities of the world, but cannot be identified with the world. As the visible body contains the invisible soul, so Christians are seen living in the world, but their religious life remains unseen. The body hates the soul and wars against it, not because of any injury the soul has done it, but because of the restriction the soul places on its pleasures. Similarly, the world hates the Christians, not because they have done it any wrong, but because they are opposed to its enjoyments.

Christians love those who hate them, just as the soul loves the body and all its members despite the body's hatred. It is by the soul enclosed within the body that the body is held together and similarly it is by the Christians that the world is held together. The soul, though immortal, has a mortal dwelling place; and the Christians also live for a time amidst perishable things, while awaiting the freedom from change and decay that will be theirs in heaven. As the soul benefits from the deprivation of food and drink, so Christians flourish under persecution. Such is the Christian's lofty and divinely appointed function, from which he is not permitted to excuse himself.”

I cannot tell you how many thoughts came to me as I read this Reading as part of the daily prayer of the Church. Let me share some of them. Have some of your own.

Clearly one must think of the early persecutions in the Church and see how today we face a similar situation in our so-called civilized and modern world. Terrorists, for whatever reason, religious or more likely political, find excuse to revive earlier persecutions. It is particularly sad that this terrorism and hatred of Christians is cloaked in a religious incentive. One must wonder how any who worship God as “Allah, the Almighty and Merciful” can find it a blessed way of life to kill Christians, or any others.

Yet I could not focus only on the persecutions so often noted in our media with various politically correct terminology. I cannot but be sad that there exists in our beautiful land a desire for some to force Christians and other religious people into a closed confinement to their churches or places of worship. Christians are not really wanted by these deviants from our Constitution’s meaning of the First Amendment to have any public role in the national life.

I liked, too, the phrase that Christians who are truly such do not hate others. How often we hear that those who for good reasons of conscience oppose same sex marriage hate those who desire to practice this relationship as equal to marriage as defined for thousands of years. I never even knew the word “homophobe” and I absolutely reject that I and any true Catholic Christian can be such. As the reading above says, “Christians love all men.” Our love includes a desire that all find happiness in the shared gift of God’s Mercy. [Don’t you really want His mercy to extend to all, since it finds no diminishment of the mercy you want for yourself? I hope so.]

Such a reflection as comes from this reading has made me realize how important it really is for us to live the Spirit. We must live in the knowledge that the Lord is with us. We must be willing not to excuse ourselves from the necessary way of life that Christians in our own time must live. The world needs us. Our mission is to continue to do the world much good, as the Creator desires us to do. The Church calls us to a new evangelization, a retelling of the good news of the Gospel.

In the above Reading the enemies of the Christians in early times were described as Jews and Greeks. Both societies (as societies) have long since disappeared. But we see how some aspects of these societies are again a threat to the plan God has for humanity. I see in the mention of the Jews something of the attitude of those within the Church who believe they must force all others to accept their own narrow view of what our Christian life should be, even as it contradicts the freedom offered by the true and defined teachings and practice of the Church. I see in the Greeks mentioned those who wish to live in a world of idols, false gods or no God, even in our own day, thinking man alone can matter

I also am happy knowing that in our time there are many true Christians who live with the fortitude to face persecution and are blessing this world with their gift of future blessing for the Church and mankind. We must value their sacrifice as joined to the Redeemer’s, even as we realize with pain the cost to our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. That is why I end this writing by simply adding: **Let us pray!**

God love and bless you always!

Monsignor Morrison.