

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Oct 19th 2017

Memorial of Saints John de Brébeuf and Isaac Jogues, Priests, and Companions, Martyrs

We live in an era where it is not uncommon to encounter rights-based claims based on equality. I am entitled to as much as you are! I am as good as you are! I deserve more! It is so unfair!

Yet today's readings put all of us on common ground, in a state of equality that we might not prefer to recognize. All of us have sinned. As a result, we have been deprived of the glory of God. We instead deserve His wrath. We do not feel comfortable with the consequences of sin. We arrogate to ourselves an elevated position, in which we get to decide for ourselves what is best and to live accordingly. Sin suggests offense, and yet we often casually overlook the possibility of our offenses toward God or even toward our fellow humans.

Religious people are not immune to this habit of overlooking our own offenses. We sometimes judge others harshly when we may also be sinning in other ways. As a wise person once observed, we are too often willing to judge others based on their worst days, while judging ourselves by our best intentions. Like the Pharisees and scribes, the "scholars of the law," we also sometimes focus on the matter of external conformity, without considering the disposition of our own hearts.

Who saves us from this condition of equality, in which our just desserts would include wrath, not blessing? The One who has been offended intervenes on our behalf. He sends his only begotten Son, who being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped. (See Phil. 2). He chose to empty himself and take the form of a servant, even to the point of death on a cross. We who clamor for equality, keeping up our appearances so that we can be equal to (or above) our neighbors, take note: Jesus did not put much stock in these kinds of equality claims. Instead, he demonstrates his love for us by condescending, finding no one below himself, being for and with even the least among us.

We would do well to remember his example and to try, even in some small way, to emulate it. Some of us will be more successful at this than others. Ah, more inequality! But hold the boasting, of course. If we are honest, we are not measuring up to the example of our Lord, and when we see how far we fall short, we recognize a rough form of equality there, too.

The equality of falling short – of requiring mercy – can be transforming; gratitude for receiving this mercy, even more so. Let us pray for the grace to receive this mercy, for ourselves and for our friends and neighbors (and family members, too). We all need to be transformed, renewed, and uplifted into people who bear the image of Christ more fully in the midst of our daily lives.

At mass last Sunday, our choir sang a beautiful Latin chant, which is also appropriate for these readings:

Ne nos mente dividamur, caveamus. Cessent iurgia maligna, cessent lites. Et in medio nostri sit Christus Deus.

This is translated as follows:

We must take care not to be divided in mind. Let petty quarrels end, let bickering cease, and let Christ our God be in our midst.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

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