

Homily 6th Sunday in Easter (21.5.17)

Christian witness

- better to suffer for doing right, than for doing wrong!

As I pondered these readings, a phrase from the letter of St Peter stuck out very forcefully,

'If you have to suffer, better to suffer for doing right, than for doing wrong.'

And I recalled the Bishop's recent sermon to the Confirmandi. He pointed out to them that of all the religions, the Christian religion which preaches peace, loving enemies and not retaliating is the most persecuted in the world today. He said that in the last three or four years, around 10,000 Christians have either been imprisoned for their faith, or executed, to say nothing of the millions of Christians driven from their homes in the Middle East. Unfortunately this persecution happens mainly in Muslim countries, but it can also come from militant Hindus in India. In Pakistan for example, Christians can be accused of blasphemy against Islam, without any firm evidence, and the mere accusation is enough to justify imprisonment, and often death. The Bishop went on to say that Confirmation seals us with the Holy Spirit, to give us courage to witness, and withstand persecution. He then went on to say that in the West, we won't (yet) be put to death for our faith – but the persecution here is much more subtle. It takes the form of demeaning and deriding, and saying – especially to young people – you don't go to church do you – that's backward.

Now I make a habit every other day or so of looking up the news on Yahoo. I do that because it's so BAD! True to form, I found an article on Yahoo this week entitled 'Professor produces a detailed study to show that religious people are less intelligent.' So I'm sure you'll be pleased to know that you're all thick, because you have faith! Now I do have a chat name on Yahoo, and occasionally I leave 'nearly' rude comments, because some of the simplistic articles make me so angry! I did put a few comments questioning the intelligence of this so called 'professor.'

If you think about it, some of the greatest minds that have ever lived have been people of faith – I'm thinking in particular of Thomas Aquinas, whose philosophy

is still studied in universities today. In more recent times, people of faith have included great minds like Solzhenitsyn, Einstein, T.S. Eliot and Marconi - (the inventor of the wireless) and many others. Some of the greatest philosophers through the ages were also theologians. But an article like that on Yahoo – unbelievably crass as it is – just shows you what our young people are confronted with, and the pressures they are under to conform to the world. Another of the ‘professor’s’ inaccuracies stated that if you have faith, you don’t have reason. Speaking for the Catholic faith, I have to say that that idea is **TOTALLY FALSE**. The Catholic Faith says that we must have faith with reason - we must use reason and use our mind to think, test and examine things.

Our young people are tested and pressurised in ways that didn’t apply to many of us when we were young. They’re looked on as being odd. This is real martyrdom. We should give them as much encouragement and support as possible. Just like our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world who are persecuted physically, we are asked to have the same courage in withstanding our more subtle Western persecution. We’re asked through our Confirmation to pray for that ‘Advocate’ that ‘Defender’ that Jesus speaks of, the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised to all his followers. We are to trust in the Spirit, that he will come to our defence, and give us the words to say when, in whatever form, we are under attack for our beliefs.

And so today, I think we need to reflect on the increasing pressures from the secular world to conform. How easily do we buckle and perhaps hide our faith out of embarrassment. Do we resist the unjust things that are done to, and said about our Christian faith? Think of the things that have happened in the law courts, the ban on wearing crosses in the workplace, the closure of Catholic adoption agencies, the pressures to conform to the new definition of marriage and so on. I was really proud of that M.P. who had been to Mass on Ash Wednesday, and received the cross on her forehead. Later in the day she was still wearing the cross at a televised parliamentary select committee meeting, despite being advised to rub it off. Now that takes courage, and maybe we should ask ourselves do we have that same courage to witness to our faith. I’m not saying ram the faith down people’s throats – but I am saying have the

courage to stand up for the rights of our faith, persevere, be strong and above all be proud to follow Jesus Christ – who is the way the truth and the life!