

Fourth Sunday Per Annum (C)

January 31, 2016.

But Jesus passed through the midst of them and went on His way (Lk. 4:30).

Our Gospel reading is a continuation of last Sunday's Gospel. Having returned to Nazareth where He had been brought up, Our Lord encounters the opposition which is often experienced when the Gospel is first preached. St John observes: *And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil (Jn. 3:19)*. In every age there have been martyrs. The prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah were both martyred for their faithful witness. Our own age is experiencing a persecution of Christians which rivals even the earliest persecutions of our faith (<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/>). Why are there persecutions? St. Paul provides a very simple answer to this question. *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived (2 Tim. 3:12-13)*. In the dialogue between Our Lord and those in attendance in the synagogue in Nazareth, He reminds them of the past rejections of the prophets and this becomes a source of such a conflict that, as we have just heard, *all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove Jesus out of the town, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl Him off the cliff. But Jesus passed through the midst of them and went on His way (Lk. 4:29-30)*. Imagine for a moment what this scene would have been like: loud, raucous, violent; there would have been pushing and shoving, and yet, *Jesus passed through the midst of them and went on His way (Lk. 4:30)*. By what power would He have been able to do this is not by His power as God? This incident in Our Lord's life is a manifestation and revelation of His divinity and of the complete freedom with which He accomplishes His greatest work, His Sacred Passion.

It is St. John who records for us words that we do well to remember: *For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father (Jn. 10:17-18)*. How else could Our Lord have passed through this raging crowd if not by His power as God? His courage both on the brow of the hill and in His sacred Passion is the source of Christian courage. This is the courage of the holy Martyrs and it the source of our courage as we witness to the truth of Christ in a confused and confusing time. The Catholic Church has an official book of Martyrs. It is called the *Roman Martyrology (Martyrologium Romanum)*. A copy of it is in front of the pulpit. It is in Latin and an English translation of it is not yet available. There is an entry for each day of the year that includes our feasts, the feasts of Saints and of course, the Martyrs. The last entry for January 31st commemorates the martyrdom of the Korean Martyrs of the nineteenth century: *In Korea, the holy martyrs Augustine Pak, catechist, and five companions; who having endured many sufferings, with fearless fortitude professed the Christian faith and glorified God in their death by beheading*. Perhaps these Martyrs were familiar with the medieval prayer, *Anima Christi, Soul of Christ* in which we pray, *Passion of Christ, strengthen me*.

St Thomas Aquinas, whose feast we celebrated on the 28th of January, observed that ***the passion of Christ completely suffices to fashion our lives***. *Whoever wishes to live perfectly should do nothing but disdain what Christ disdained on the cross and desire what He desired, for the cross exemplifies every virtue* (Collatio 6 super *Credo in Deum*). This is why Our Lord left us the Mass as the Memorial of His Sacred Passion; that we who have received the gift of salvation through His Passion and Death, might have the courage and the strength to bear whatever hardships arise for His sake.

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived (2 Tim. 3:12-13). In less than two weeks we will begin the observance of the Holy Season of Lent and unite ourselves more intimately with Our Lord in His Sacred Passion. As we give thought to our Lenten discipline and how we might be more closely united to Our Lord, let us fortify ourselves with the courage of Our Lord; ever mindful that the *Passion of Christ completely suffices to fashion of our lives*.

Passion of Christ, strengthen me. O Good Jesus, bear me. Within thy wounds hide me. Permit me not to be separated from thee. From the wicked enemy, defend me. At the hour my death, call me and bid me come to thee; that with thy saints I may praise thee for all eternity. Amen.