

Very Reverend Glenn Jones

Vicar General, Vicar for Clergy, Vicar for Religious

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Hardly a week goes by in the Catholic calendar in which there is no memorial of a saint, and very often remembrance of one who endured great hardship or martyrdom. We might think of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, royalty who gave away all her wealth. Or Damien of Molokai, who chose lifelong exile to minister to the lepers. Or the thousands of missionaries who gave their lives to spread the Christian faith among unbelievers, hoping to lead them to eternal life and joy with God. Or the nuns who went singing to the guillotine. Or the many martyrs even of today in places like Nigeria and in the Middle East, holding to their faith even unto death. To their *conviction* of faith.

To the world, these may seem like fools, but as St. Paul exclaims: "... we have become a spectacle to the world ... We are fools for Christ's sake." (1 Corinthians 4:9-10) But they had seen something better for which even death was worth suffering: the truth of God and confidence in the eternal life He promises. "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood." (1 Corinthians 13:12)

I was considering these while reviewing the Mass readings for Sunday, Feb. 9. One of them comes from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

The Corinthians, being Greek, originally worshiped many various gods, or maybe none at all. So, the early Corinthian Christians were surrounded by pagan neighbors whose only goal in life was to get what they could out of the world. These non-believers gave little thought to what lay beyond this life and may have ridiculed anyone who was "foolish" enough to renounce decadent pleasures for the sake of something they expected after death.

One can imagine the great fortitude and courage—*conviction*—for the Corinthian Church faithful to brave the crowd of mocking pleasure-seekers whose only motto was likely: "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!" But to these early Christians' great credit—assisted by God's grace and Paul's exhortations—they did. At least in our day, we have the support of millennia of history of the Christian faith; in Paul's day, it was a brand new and little-known faith.

But ... doesn't that situation sound familiar? Are we not living in a similar time? "Hooking up? Lying, cheating, and stealing? Great! Getting drunk or stoned? Great! ... just so nothing interferes with the carnal pleasure of this moment! Now is all that matters. Your satisfaction is all that matters ... no matter who you hurt! No matter if you go against this Jesus."

In the Gospel for the same Mass, we read of foreshadowing the call of the Christian vocation. After a long night of fishing failure, Jesus gets into Peter's boat, and He instructs Peter to let down his nets. Exhausted from fruitless hours of labor, Peter and shipmates had their doubts. Regardless, Peter let down his nets due to his conviction of Jesus, at least as having some power of God coming through Him. Peter & Co., Inc., then haul in an enormous catch. Peter's reward for faith is beyond his understanding. Beyond his imagination.

Yet the Christian of today—like the Corinthians long ago—is sometimes besieged from all sides to forget Christ ... to abandon the task of fishing for God ... to take the easy, tempting, and pointless way of the world apart from God. Apart from morality. Apart from goodness. Even those who love God might recognize their own weaknesses and perceived unworthiness and cry out with Peter: "*Depart from me, for I am sinful, O Lord.*"

But God, of course, already knows this; He knows that we are not worthy in the strict sense. But Christ came with His saving sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection all the same and opened the floodgates of grace onto the world so much that He assures His faithful: "I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (John 14:3)

In baptism, God gives us a mission to perform in the world. Such a vocation is not only for ministers and priests, monks and nuns, but for all the baptized—a mission in life for God and to spread the good news of God's love and charity throughout the world.

And so God calls to us as He called generations long before ours. So will we dare to go into the deep to search the lost and forsaken, the despairing and lonely, the marginalized and forgotten? Will we dare to be the light to the world as Christ calls us to be?...even knowing that we will face resistance, rejection, and even ridicule? Will we respond to God's call in daily life?

For argument's sake, let us say that the world could give us all the pleasures, wealth, and power we desire (which, of course, it neither can nor will). Death comes nonetheless ... to cut us off from all the phantoms which we cherish. Then what?

As Jesus tells us: "As were the days of Noah...before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man... Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom his master has set over his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing." (Matthew 24:37-44)

We are given the grace to set before all peoples the spiritual sustenance of Christ—by our words and by our lives. Will we have the wisdom to plan ahead...to go fishing with Peter to bring in a catch for Christ? Will we have courage, in whatever situation we find ourselves in life,

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to respond to God's call: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Will we trust Jesus when He assures: "Do not be afraid."

Let us have the courage, the faith, the love for God—the *conviction*—to cry out with the prophet Isaiah: "Here I am; Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8)