

"Don't Worry"
Mark 13:1-13

November 15, 2015

25th Sunday After Pentecost

Tell me if this sounds familiar. the collapse of man-made structures; false preachers proclaiming false doctrine and becoming very popular; various wars happening and talk about other wars; political turmoil; natural disasters (earthquakes, famines, etc.); and the persecution of Christians. While it sounds like a summary of today's newspaper (especially after the recent terror attacks in Paris), it is actually a summary of today's text in the Gospel according to St. Mark. The fact that it so clearly predicts the times leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD while, at the same time, forshadowing the end of the world, indicates that this is pretty much the scenario in which Christians shall live until the Lord returns.

How does a Christian respond? Such events naturally cause us to worry. How are we to survive such horrible disasters? We worry. How do we answer attacks on our faith by false teachers without being led astray? We worry. When put on the spot before hostile audiences to bear witness to Jesus Christ, what will we ever say? We have a hard enough time speaking of Jesus Christ to each other when times are good. What will we say to those who hate Christ and ridicule our faith when times are bad? This is where we probably worry the most..

We worry that we will say something that is wrong. We'll say something that contradicts the Christian faith or even denies Christ in an effort to be accepted by those around us. We worry that we will not say something that is right. We'll leave something crucial out of our testimony because we don't know the Bible well enough. Worst of all, we worry that we won't say anything at all. Out of fear of losing the love of our family, the respect of our friends, and, perhaps, our own well being, even our own lives, we'll just clam up and say nothing at all in order to stay safe.

So what do we do? Of all the things in our text which we could be worrying about, there is one thing Jesus specifically says that we don't have to be anxious about beforehand: what it is we are to say when we are called to bear witness to Jesus Christ. We are to say whatever is given to us by the Holy Spirit.

That sounds very simplistic because, since the problem seems so difficult, the solution should be more complicated. But this is the way the Holy Spirit works. He is Giver. We are receivers. We are in trouble, confusion, and worry. He gives us the words we need.

First, and most important of all, He gives us the Word made flesh, Jesus, who came to deliver us from sin, death, and the devil and from all the fear, anxiety, and danger which they cause in our world. Because Jesus took our sin upon Himself and died upon the cross, we have forgiveness of all our sins, freedom from Satan and all of his forces, and liberation from death itself. His resurrection from the dead powerfully proves that. While the forces of evil – even horrific terrorist attacks - may conspire against us as the world draws to an end, they cannot and they will not overcome us.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit gives us the Word, written and recorded for us “by men [speaking] from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:21) The Holy Bible is not just a nice book to sit on a coffee table or to present to a confirmand with his/her name engraved in gold letters to give an appearance of religiosity or spirituality. “These [things] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit gives us the Word connected to a visible element in order to bring us blessing. The Word given to us by the Holy Spirit - with water in Holy Baptism, through the voice of a called servant pronouncing Absolution, and over bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper – creates, nurtures, and strengthens faith in Jesus Christ, thus preparing us to face the worst that the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh can throw at us.

Is it any wonder then that, when called upon to witness to those who reject our Lord, oppose the Gospel and mock the faith in these troubling end times, it is the Holy Spirit who will give us what we need to say at any given moment? He has faithfully given to us the Word made flesh by testifying of Jesus Christ that we might be saved through Him. He has faithfully provided us with the written Word that we might believe in and receive our salvation through Jesus Christ. He has faithfully given us the Word attached to water, to a voice, and to bread and wine to strengthen our

faith and assure us of our salvation. Thus, we can be sure that He will faithfully provide us with the spoken Word to use in testifying, both before favorable and hostile audiences, to the promises of God, fulfilled for us by the Word made flesh and given to us by the written Word recorded for us.

But the Holy Spirit doesn't do this in any sort of magical or mystical way. I don't believe that, in a tense or difficult situation, a divine light bulb suddenly goes on over your head and you suddenly begin speaking of things you didn't know before. If you are waiting for that, you could be in trouble. The Holy Spirit always works through visible tangible means when He works within us and that is true in this case.

All of you have probably heard the story about the man trapped on the roof of his house by a raging flood and was waiting for the Lord to save him. He declined assistance from two boats and a helicopter because he was so sure that the Lord would save him. The man drowned and appeared before the Lord in heaven. He asked the Lord why He didn't save him from the flood. The Lord replied, "Well, I did send two boats and a helicopter."

A similar story could be told here. I'm sure that there are a number of people who think the Holy Spirit is going to speak to them and through them because they identify as Christians, yet they rarely attend Divine Service, are not interested in Bible Class, and claim to have no time to read the Scriptures and have devotions at home. I suspect that, when called to witness to Jesus Christ, they will have little or nothing to say. And they will complain and say, "Lord, why didn't you give me the Words to say when I needed them." The Lord will reply, "I provided you a church where you could hear my Word. I sent you a pastor to teach you my Word. I gave you my Word and devotional materials in your own language to use."

The Holy Spirit is the one who will provide you with the words to speak when you are called on to witness to Jesus Christ. However, you need to put yourself in the position to receive the words the Holy Spirit has to give you. That means, as the writer to the Hebrews says, "not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another" by hearing the Word of God read and preached in Divine Service. It means being in Bible Study, whether you are a child or an adult, so

that you may explore the Word of God more in depth. It means carving out time in your busy schedule to read the Scriptures and contemplate them from Monday through Saturday so that the Holy Spirit may continue working in you every day.

As the Holy Spirit draws you closer to the Word made flesh in the reception of His gifts in Divine Service and as the Holy Spirit increases your faith, knowledge, and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as you “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest [the Holy Scriptures]”, He is preparing you now for that time in the future when you will need them. In other words, He is already giving you the words you need before you need them. When you are called to witness, it will come from what you already have and already know.

Back in the late 1980's, there was this annoying little song that became unbearably popular on the radio in those days: “Don't worry; Be Happy!” It exuded a naïve reason for not worrying by simply deciding to be happy. That's not what Jesus is talking about here. He is not saying, “Don't worry about the approaching end of time or what you will say when it comes. Just be positive and it will be okay.” No, He is saying, “Don't worry; Be confident.”. Continue in the Word in all of its forms and manifestations – the human Word, Jesus, the written Word, the Sacramental Word, and the spoken Word. When difficult times come and you are called to speak, don't worry and don't be anxious. The Holy Spirit will give you what to say, when to say it, and how to say it. He's got it covered for you. Amen.