

August 23, 2009

This week, Solomon dedicated his temple and declared it to be a house of prayer for all nations. The Pauline writer taught that we should put on the whole armor of God. And, Jesus made his final statement on the Bread of Life as he experienced a dramatic reaction from some of his disciples. The main emphasis in today's lessons has to do with persistence of faith. On one occasion Jesus said, *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."* Luke 9:62.

I. Solomon Was Faithful Until the End. I Kings 8:(1, 6, 10-11) 23-30, 41-43

Solomon was persistent in building God a house-Solomon's temple. For two Sundays now after following the David saga, we have encountered King Solomon. I must admit to you that I like King David better than I do King Solomon. I love David because I can identify with the fact that he was always close to God in spite of his many, many flaws.

What I appreciate about Solomon, however, is that in his youth, he said and did all of the right things. He asked God for wisdom. He was obedient to God. He established the temple as a place of worship, situated the Ark of the Covenant within the Holies of Holies, led worship before the whole assembly and set the tone for temple worship for all times. He petitioned God to heed the prayers that people would make from that place and asked God to forgive the sins of any who in contrition called upon the name of God. Then finally, he declared the temple to be a house of prayer for all nations. This practice solidify his kingdom and established Jerusalem as the worship center for all Israel.

Solomon, however, did many thing that the chroniclers did not like, such as making alliances with foreign nations by marrying the princesses of their kings. He allowed idol worship to take place upon the high places and he summarily removed any threat to his kingdom by killed all possible enemy. In spite of all of this, God loved Solomon and blessed him all of the days of his life. Having put his hands to God's plow of faithfulness, he seldom looked back and remained a good king until the end.

II. Put On The Whole Armor Of God

The Pauline writer preached that a Christian must put on the whole armor of God to remain persistent in faith. Paul was on his way to prison in Rome or Ephesus while being chained to a soldier. Being so closely linked to that soldier, there must have been some interesting conversations between the two of them. As Paul thought about the armor that the soldier wore, it became a metaphor for the Christian faith. A soldier carried a shield. There was sword on his right side, a bronze helmet on his head and grieves on his wrists. He had a bronze breastplate on his chest, steady shoes on his feet, and he usually carried two javelins.

Paul must have thought to himself that Christians too needed armor to protect them in their war against evil and the devil. They needed to wrap their waist with the belt of truth, to protect their hearts with a breastplate of righteousness and to cover their feet with the proclamation of peace. They needed to carry a shield of faith to ward off the fiery darts of the devil, to protect their minds with a helmet of salvation and to let the word of God always be their defensive weapon against all onslaughts.

Above all Paul asked the Ephesians to pray in the spirit at all times. They should labor in prayers for the saints of God who carry the gospel of Christ. And, finally, he asked for prayers for himself as he witnessed to the word of God with boldness. The Christian must be a faithful warrior for Christ.

We live in a time of dwindling numbers of people who see the church as relevant. Our stadia and recreational venues are filled on Sunday mornings rather than our churches. Religion and church is considered to have little to do with peoples' lives. Materialism and greed are found from the highest elected officials to prelates in the church. Marriages are failing and no child is safe left alone. If there ever was a time that we needed a persistence of faith and morals, it is today. Each and all of us should become faithful in our own beliefs and practices as we seek to be warriors for Christ Jesus.

III. Walk With Jesus Until The End

Jesus had said, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you*" (John 6:53). Some of his disciples found these words to be too difficult for them to hear and so they left him.

One reason for the difficulty had to do with the reaction of the Roman authorities. Their duty was to maintain peace and order. Let us imagine that you are a soldier secretly standing outside one of the catacombs in ancient Rome. You have been sent there by your superiors because they heard that a clandestine religious sect was meeting there and committing horrible acts of violence. You were also told that they were unpatriotic toward Rome.

While on duty, you overheard someone say, "Unless, you eat this flesh and drink this blood, you shall have no life in you." What would you think? No doubt, being suspicious from the beginning, you would think that somebody was being eaten. The Christians of the First Century faced that suspicion all of the time. Because of it, some enemies of the Christians accused them of cannibalism and of being seditionists. They were subsequently persecuted and many of them were martyred.

Another reason might have been because the Jews had an aversion to eating blood, period. They felt that way because they believed that the life of a person or animal was contained in its blood. Even today, Jews eat kosher meats that have been properly drain of blood by a Rabbi.

And, still another reason probably had to do with the fact it is human nature that when things get tough, many people will abandon the cause.

Jesus' response to the questioning disciple was, "*Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?*" If the disciples had difficulty with his revealing the truth about his being the bread of life, it would be more difficult for them when they actually witness him ascending into heaven.

Afterwards, Jesus then explained where true life comes from. He said, "*It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoke to you are spirit and life.*" Herein lies the key to understanding what Jesus meant by eating his flesh and drinking his blood. It is in the Eucharist that we find life sustaining food. It is in the Bible by reading and inwardly digest God's words that we learn to live righteous lives.

At his temptation Jesus said, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Thus, Jesus is the incarnate word of God that came down from heaven and gives life to the world. He who eats of this flesh and drink of this blood shall have the life of Christ in them.

Finally, Jesus looked at Peter and ask whether or not Peter wished to depart from him as well. Peter's faith response was a statement for all times, "*Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.*" John 6:67-69.

Peter expressed a persistence of faith for all times and for all believers. Oh, there would be times when Peter was weak in his faith, as it is with all of us, but Peter became the rock of the church and its first bishop.

May God grand each of us that persistence of faith all of our lives as well. Amen. Amen.