

Overcoming Rejection

We know that Jesus was rejected at the very start of his ministry when he returned to Nazareth from his time in the wilderness. When he read from the book of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue those present took offense at him: they were filled with rage and wanted to throw him off the cliff on the edge of town.

This rejection spread through Galilee as Jesus preached and taught and healed. Some even thought he was possessed by a demon. When Jesus acknowledged this rejection and told his disciples that in Jerusalem he would not only be rejected, he'd be killed; they had a hard time understanding. Jesus did not fear rejection, persecution, execution by the political and religious authorities.

Luke tells us that shortly after the Transfiguration Jesus began his journey to Jerusalem. In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus proclamation, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it." Again, Jesus anticipates his Passion and Glory. We know that it is not only the Pharisees and Chief Priests who will soon reject Jesus and order his arrest. His own disciples will betray him, deny him and abandon him. Only John and Mary will follow him to the cross.

Yet Luke also tells us in today's reading that some Pharisees were truly concerned with Jesus' safety. They warn him about Herod. We know that in Jerusalem Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimethea, two leading Pharisees in the Sanhedrin, attempt to support Jesus and at the end, they bury his body. We can assume that not all the religious authorities, nor all the Romans, rejected Jesus. Some believed. Some wanted to believe. Some were sympathetic.

This combination of acceptance and rejection is what we see in the history of the world to our present time. There will be believers and there will be, as St. Paul reminds us, "enemies of the cross of Christ..." Those who in the words of today's collect "have gone astray ..." we continue to pray for. In fact, in the solemn collects for Good Friday, we pray specifically for "enemies of the cross of Christ and persecutors of his disciples..."

Few of us will experience rejection because of our Christian faith. Yet, we live in solidarity with all those around the world who are the victims of hatred, terror and violence – people of all faiths. And as we saw last week with the mass murders at the Mosques in New Zealand – there is a continual battle between love and justice and peace built upon mutual respect and acceptance and those forces of hatred and death that reject and persecute the faithful.

So how does Jesus prepare his disciples to overcome rejection? What are his lessons for us today? How do compassionate people of faith respond to acts of terror?

First of all, we remember Jesus' teaching "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you... If they persecuted me, they will persecute you..." (John 15:18-19) There is a real conflict and if we follow Christ, we will know conflict with the world and with those who reject love, truth, justice and peace.

We can overcome all forms of rejection through our spiritual lives, our life of prayer and worship. Prayer leads us into forgiveness, into knowing and trusting God's love. The spiritual life built upon the sacramental life of the Church empowers us to know and to see God at work in our world.

This, of course, leads us to community. Our relationship with others supports us through any and all rejection. Jesus built a community of disciples. He prayed that they would become unified. He prayed that they would be sanctified in truth and kept safe from evil.

Finally, we can face rejection knowing Jesus' love brings God's judgement. Love triumphs always. Truth triumphs always. God's judgement comes in God's time, not in ours. It can seem like a very long time – this time of rejection. God redeems all time. Near the end of his farewell address in John's Gospel Jesus says "you will have peace in me ... in the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world ..." (16:32-33)

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35