

Devotional Reflection, Wednesday, July 24, 2024
Proper 11, the week of the ninth Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

Sharing in Jesus' Courage

Key phrases for reflection from today's Gospel reading:

many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward 61 and said, 'This fellow said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days."' 62 The high priest stood up and said, 'Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?' 63 But Jesus was silent. . . . 63 But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, 'I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.' 64 Jesus said to him, 'You have said so.

You will find the full text of today's Gospel at the end of this reflection.

Daily Office Lectionary Readings (BDP, 977)

AM Psalm 119:49-72; PM Psalm 49, [53]

Joshua 8:30-35; Rom. 14:13-23; Matt. 26:57-68

Today we celebrate the Feast of Thomas À Kempis. (See below.)

David's Reflections

Jesus' sufferings are held up in the New Testament as an example for all believers who suffer indignities and/or arrest and persecution for their faith. (See 1 Peter 2 for the clearest example.) The Gospels were written when believers were under increasing suspicion from their Roman overlords. (Jesus' means of execution was punishment for treason and his followers called him Lord (*kyrios*), the same title of reverence as citizens used for the emperor.) They also were experiencing resistance from the Jewish community. This narrative of Jesus' trial finds its backdrop against those circumstances of the time frame in which the Gospels were written.

Americans do not think of our land as a place in which religious persecution takes place. Yet, some members of families undergo embarrassing treatment from relatives. Some employees endure unequal treatment from employers and from coworkers because of their values and beliefs. Some lose their jobs or forfeit promotions because of unwillingness to compromise. Churches and individuals can encounter bias in public officials. In a rare appearance in traffic court in Alabama, I once wore a blazer, shirt and tie rather than clerics out of concern for that particular bias against anything or anyone thought to be Catholic.

My point has nothing to do with paranoia or some sort of martyr complex. Actually, I personally have had my worst experiences from a few scattered individuals *within* the Christian community. Rather, my point has to do with how we respond to unfair and unjust treatment that takes place precisely because of our faith.

Jesus did not defend himself against the caricatures thrust in his face. The misunderstandings blinding his persecutors would resist any defense he might make, and they had no confidence in his word anyway. He did maintain his witness to his identity, but even that was done in a subdued fashion. He endured mistreatment both verbal and physical without responding in kind or with any sort of malice or fearful cringing. He stared his accusers in the eye and did not flinch.

This unflinching demeanor I would label as courage. Rollo May has some insightful words about courage.

. . . courage will not be the opposite of despair. We shall often be faced with despair, as indeed every sensitive person has been during the last several decades in this country. . . . courage is not the absence of despair; it is, rather, the capacity to move ahead *in spite of despair*.

A chief characteristic of this courage is that it requires a centeredness within our own being, without which we would feel ourselves to be a vacuum. The 'emptiness' within corresponds to an apathy without; and apathy adds up, in the long run, to cowardice. That is why we must always base our commitment in the center of our own being, or else no commitment will be ultimately authentic.*

May we find in God's Spirit the courage of Jesus within ourselves.

* Rollo May, *The Courage to Create* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), pp. 12-13.

Collect of the Day, Proper 11, the ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 231)

Today we celebrate the Feast of Thomas À Kempis, priest, monk, and writer (died 25 July 1471 CE).

http://www.satucket.com/lectionary/Thomas_a_Kempis.htm

Collect of the Feast of Thomas À Kempis

Holy Father, you have nourished and strengthened your church by the writings of your servant Thomas à Kempis: Grant that we may learn from him to know what is necessary to be known, to love what is to be loved, to praise what highly pleases you, and always to seek to know and to follow your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

A Collect for Grace

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought us in safety to this new day: Preserve us with your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all we do, direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 100)

For stewardship of creation

O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: Make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 259)

A Collect for Early Evening

O Lord God Almighty, as you have taught us to call the evening, the morning, and the noonday one day; and have made the sun to know its going down: Dispel the darkness of our hearts, that by your brightness we may know you to be the true God and eternal light, living and reigning for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 110)

A Collect for Mission

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. *Amen.* (BCP, 101)

Daily Office Gospel, Matthew 26:57-68

57 Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered. 58 But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end. 59 Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, 60 but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward 61 and said, ‘This fellow said, “I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.”’ 62 The high priest stood up and said, ‘Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?’ 63 But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, ‘I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.’ 64 Jesus said to him, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ 65 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, ‘He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. 66 What is your verdict?’ They answered, ‘He deserves death.’ 67 Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him, 68 saying, ‘Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?’

Daily Offices in the Book of Common Prayer

Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, *The Book of Common Prayer*

Noonday Prayer, page 103, *Book of Common Prayer*

Order of Worship for Evening (Vespers), p 109, *Book of Common Prayer*

Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, *Book of Common Prayer*
Compline (Night Prayer), page 127, *Book of Common Prayer*
Daily Devotionals, page 136, *Book of Common Prayer*