

**Doing It Right**  
A Sermon for Every Sunday, Pentecost 17B  
*Wisdom of Solomon 1:16-2:1, 12-22;*  
*Mark 9:3-37*

*En arche EN ho logos,  
kai ho logos EN pros ton theon,  
Kai theos EN ho logos.*

“Can someone please translate for us?”

Fr. Ginyak was sitting with his small group of students in a hot classroom at Catholic University in Washington. We were taking his course called “Intro to New Testament Greek.” He was an excellent, demanding teacher. He gave us lots of homework. He expected us to work hard and be prepared.

So on this particular day, he read the Greek text to us – “en arche en ho logos” and then said, “who can translate?”

No one answered.

He pointed to me and said: “Michael? Can you do it?” I shook my head. The professor pointed to other students: “Stephen? Rick?” He asked all the seminarians. Not one of us could translate the passage.

Then he said, “Karen, you can do it. *En arche en ho logos*..... And Karen translated: “In the beginning was the word....”

Fr. Ginyak smiled. The rest of us frowned. She had done it again. Karen, the only female in the class, the only non-seminarian, had once again made us look foolish and unprepared (which, by the way, is exactly what we were!).

Karen was, frankly, amazing. The mother of three small children. She worked full time. And since she wanted to do Youth Ministry, she enrolled as a full time student in theology at Catholic University. Her schedule was crazy. And yet, in every class, she was the one who was always prepared, always did all of the reading, all of the homework. I don’t know how she did it!

And then, there were the seminarians. There we were – being taken care of by the church: fed three meals a day, given time for prayer and study. All we had to do was go to class and do our homework! But, somehow, we never seemed to get everything done.

We cut corners, did not do all of the reading. We complained about our work load. But somehow

Karen – the mother of three children who worked full time - was always prepared for class.

So, over a period of time, we really started to dislike Karen! Not because she was doing anything to purposefully embarrass us. Rather, we did not like her because she was doing what all of us were SUPPOSED to be doing. When she showed up, prepared and ready, she made the rest of us look... lazy. She was doing things right – and her presence revealed that we were doing things wrong. So we murmured to ourselves, “As long as Karen is around, we will pale in comparison.”

Sometimes, we resent people because they are doing the wrong thing. Sometimes, we resent people simply because they are doing the right thing!

The Scriptures which are offered for our prayer today describe people who face the anger and resentment of others, precisely because they are living their lives the way that God calls all of us to live! They are doing it right – and that upsets the people around them.

The Wisdom of Solomon speaks about a ‘righteous man’ – and the Gospel of Mark speaks of Jesus, the Son of Man. In both of these readings, people want to get rid of the righteous man, and they want to get rid of Jesus, not because Jesus or the righteous man are doing something wrong, but because the righteous Man and Jesus are living Godly lives.... and the presence of a godly person reveals the lack of godliness in everyone else around them.

In the passage from the Wisdom of Solomon, we hear about the threats that are whispered about a man whose name we do not know. What we DO know is that he is ‘righteous’ – that is, he is listening to God’s wisdom, learning God’s ways, living as God calls us to live. You might think such a person might be praised. But, the people in this passage are tired of him. They want to get rid of him. And why? Because he listened to God. He prays. He is dedicated to God’s truth....and that shakes people up.

When a holy person is in your midst, you either are inspired and try to follow their example, or you seek to get rid of them, so you don’t have to change! The people in this passage from the Wisdom of Solomon decided that enough was enough – so they plot to destroy the righteous one. What do they say about this righteous man? They say:

+ Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us

+ He calls himself a child of the Lord.

+ The very sight of him is a burden to us, because his manner of life is unlike that of others

+ He avoids our ways as unclean; he calls the last end of the righteous happy, and boasts that God is his father.

Jesus faces similar resistance, and a similar threat. He says it plainly to his disciples in Mark’s Gospel: “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.”

Why would people want to kill Jesus? Why would they want to crucify the sinless one? He has done good deeds. He has done good works in the name of the Father. He has healed, fed the hungry, cared for the lame, forgiven sinners. He spoke the truth.

Some people rejoice. And some people can't stand it! Perhaps they can't stand Jesus because, as long as he is in their midst, it becomes clear that they are not being faithful to God. So they have a choice – either change their lives to become more Christ-like, or crucify him.

So, two questions for your Christian reflection today:

The First is this - have you ever found yourself in the position of Karen, or the Righteous Man, or Jesus? Have you ever become 'the enemy' simply for doing what is right, saying what is true, following God's will as you understand it?

Now, we are all human, which means that we regularly do the wrong thing without intending to do so – we mess up, make mistakes, and tick people off. Sometimes we let our anger or our fear get the best of us. We sin. We make mistakes. And have to allow the Holy Spirit to show us that truth, and show us the way to conversion.

But then there are the times when people are upset with us because we are, in fact, doing what is right. It happens in families, in relationships, in churches, in life. It happened to the Righteous Man, to Jesus, and to Karen. Sometimes, we become the target, not because we are wrong, but because we are doing the Godly thing.

In those moments when you are paying the price for doing what is right, remember – you are in very good company. The prophets paid that price. The saints paid that price. The savior paid that price. The world is changed for the better when people are willing to pay the price for simply doing what is right, and true, and Christ-like.

Right now, many people are perplexed and bewildered by what is happening in our homes, in our country, in our world. So much uncertainty. So much fear, confusion, sadness. And isn't it the case that, when we are surrounded by confusion and consternation, it gets harder and harder for us to stay focused on Christ, and it gets harder and harder to just keep believing, trusting and living the Gospel? When the world is full of uncertainties, that is the time when Christians are called to just keep living the truth and doing the truth and saying the truth. Never with an attitude of self-righteousness – always with the knowledge that Christ wants us to be a beacon of his light in times of darkness... even when the darkness starts to push back against us.

So, our scripture ask us: are we willing to allow the Holy Spirit to strengthen us to do the right thing? To be people who live the truth.

And the second question: how do you handle the truth-tellers (and the truth-doers) in your own life? Sometimes *we* are the ones paying the price for doing what is right. But let's be honest, at other times, aren't we are the ones saying, "How can I get these people out of my hair? They are driving me crazy with all of their holiness, godliness, truth-telling."

Saints are not easy to live with. Prophets are not fun to have in your family or at work. There are parents, and children, and pastors, and spouses, who will tick us off with great regularity, simply because their good example offers us a stark choice: do I chase these good people away, or do I let their good example call me to deeper conversion, renewal and holiness?

Who is the truth-teller in your life right now – the one you'd love to get rid of – the one you know is an uncomfortable gift from God? Who is that person, who is forcing you to acknowledge the ways that jealousy, envy and greed are devouring your life? Who is the truth-teller who is forcing you to do the uncomfortable work of admitting your selfishness, your possessiveness, your sin? Who is making you finally deal with your warped priorities, your failure to forgive, your unwillingness to be generous to those in need?

If we pay attention to Jesus throughout the week, his presence will shake us up, and make us confront the truth. Sometimes we pay attention- and our lives are changed. Often we don't want to deal with him. But we don't have to crucify Jesus in order to get rid of him. Many of us simply try to ignore him through the week, and give him a quick hour on weekends. But we are keeping him at arm's length....

We gather for worship on Sunday. It is a good day to hear the truth of Jesus. Next Sunday will also be a good Sunday to do the same thing. But it could be a BETTER Sunday if we spent the next seven days striving to be more Christ-like. So let us cling to this Word of God, where we are inspired by the Word, the Logos, who took flesh, and dwelt among us.

—*Michael Renninger* © 2021