

Homily
14Ord.B
July 4/5, 2015
St Bernard Church

One of the most important themes of the Bible is that spiritual principles are very different from worldly principles.

Worldly principles are the ones that govern what we call the real world, but is not actually the real world at all.

So in today's 2nd reading, St. Paul recounts how, when he was undergoing severe suffering and begged God for relief, God told him not to worry, that His grace would be sufficient and that "God's power is made perfect in weakness." As we know, what we call the real world would never accept this.

Then, in the Gospel, Jesus is rejected by the very people that knew him best, the people in his hometown of Nazareth. To them, Jesus was a nobody.

Maybe they would have accepted what Jesus said if he was a celebrity, if he was from a really important place, like Hollywood.

One of the worldly principles that is widely accepted today is that perception is reality. Reality is what people think it is.

With respect to our economy, for example, an important guide is the Consumer Confidence Index, which, during each month, tells us how people feel about the economy of our country, whether it's good or bad, whether they are going to spend money or not.

The Consumer Confidence Index in Greece might have been good for quite a long time, yet eventually the true reality of mathematics caught up with the perception that things were going good. The country could no longer pay its bills. They closed the banks. Now we're not only worried about what will happen to Greece; we are worried about the impact of the financial situation in Greece on the rest of the world.

What does the Bible say about reality?

In his Letter to the Colossians, St. Paul tells us about the ultimate reality:

"In Jesus were created all things in heaven and on earth...
all things were created through him and for him.
He is before all things
And in him all things hold together."

What does this mean?

This means that if anything on earth does not conform to Christ, eventually it will fail and be gone. It might take centuries, but anything that is contrary to Christ and to his teachings will not prevail, not even in this life, not even on earth.

I can think of two clear examples of recent developments in our own country that are not at all consistent with what St. Paul said is needed to hold things together.

1. The First Example. In our own country, it used to be that judges and politicians generally accepted the moral principles found in the Bible. That's what was expected by the people, most of whom were Protestant. For those judges and politicians who were well-educated, they understood that the moral principles of the Bible were also supported by intelligent reflections on the order found in nature.

In 1992, our Supreme Court made a clear and dramatic break from this way of thinking. In the Casey decision, the Court determined that:

“At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”

What the Supreme Court meant by that statement is there were no longer any objective limits, no objective standards, for the meaning of existence, for understanding the order of the universe or for making determinations about human life. On such issues, the Court was saying it can now decide anything it wants to.

2. The Second Example. There has been a similar development in many of the Protestant churches. The Protestant Reformation was founded on the principle that the Bible was the sole basis of authority for Christians. But now, several Protestant denominations have decided that the Bible can be re-interpreted to accommodate modern attitudes even if the re-interpretation is totally contrary to what the Bible actually says.

The Catholic Church has always maintained that the Bible is inspired by God, that it teaches the truth, and that it is binding on Catholics, that nothing Catholics believe or do can be contrary to the Bible.

With all that is going on, it's going to be hard on us Catholics. We are going to be mocked, ridiculed, accused of bigotry. Some Catholics could end up in jail, just for being Catholic. There will even be some in the Church who say that we must get with the times and accommodate popular attitudes about moral issues.

We are going to be strongly challenged to trust that the teachings of the Bible will ultimately prevail over recent decisions of our Supreme Court and of some Protestant churches.

The example of Jesus' own ministry can provide comfort for us.

Jesus spent 30 years in Nazareth. He apparently didn't do anything that drew attention, as today's Gospel tells us that the people of Nazareth, the people that he had lived with, didn't think he was anything special.

He spent only 3 years in public ministry, focusing most of his attention on training 12 very ordinary men. The training he provided did not seem to be particularly effective. In the only public survey of Jesus' popularity, he lost out to a thief named Barabbas. Then Jesus was killed, and it was widely thought that what He did, what He taught, would quickly die out and be forgotten.

That didn't happen. And it didn't happen because Jesus demonstrated by His life, His death and His resurrection that God's power is made perfect in weakness, in being obedient to God's will, whatever the cost.

So we don't have to be popular. We don't have to go with the flow. In a quiet, determined way, we just have to be faithful. God's power will do the rest. And, in the end, the United States will be far better off for our faithful witness.

I want to close with this passage from Psalm 33:

"The LORD brings the plans of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The plan of the Lord stands forever, wise designs through all generations."