

Homily  
25OrdB  
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St. Bernard Church  
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## Overcoming Complacency

What does today's Gospel tell us about the apostles?

Today's account from the Gospel of Mark tells us that while Jesus was telling them that He was going to be killed, they were busy arguing about which of them was the greatest.

We might be tempted to ridicule the apostles for being so self-absorbed as to be engaged in such a ridiculous argument. Before we fall for that temptation, though, we might want to think for a few moments about what we might have in common with them.

It's obvious from the argument that the apostles were having that they were very confident of themselves. They thought they had made it as followers of Jesus. They were complacent with where they were in their faith and in their devotion to Jesus.

There's more evidence of this in the Bible.

You might recall that just before Jesus went through His passion and death, Peter said to Him, at Matthew 26:35:

“Even though I should have to die with you, I will not deny you.”

Earlier than that, when Jesus proposed that all of them go back near Jerusalem to minister to Lazarus, the disciples objected on the grounds that the people in and around Jerusalem had tried to stone them. Going back there was very risky.

But the apostle Thomas said, in John 11:16, “Let us also go with Jesus to die with him.”

Very brave talk from Peter and from Thomas. Yet we know that while Jesus was being tortured and crucified, Peter, Thomas and all of the remaining apostles except John were nowhere to be found. They had fled out of fear, and Peter denied being a follower of Jesus three times.

What does all that have to do with us?

Well, are you complacent with where you are in your faith? Am I? How much faith would we have if we were really tested, really challenged? Would our faith hold up? Are we doing anything to make sure we're growing in our faith? Or are we content with the way things are now?

Maybe we have something in common with the apostles when they were content with where they were in their faith, when they thought their faith was strong enough to overcome the challenges that awaited them.

Let's look at what happens next in the lives of the apostles.

We know that Peter wept, that he repented for denying Jesus. After the Resurrection of Jesus, when Peter atoned for his denial by telling Jesus three times that he loved Him, Jesus made Peter His chief shepherd over His followers.

My guess is that the other apostles, humiliated by having abandoned Jesus out of fear, also repented of their weak faith and their lack of courage. Their feeling of complacency was completely gone.

Even after Jesus rose from the dead and spent time with the apostles, even after they repented for their lack of courage, they continued to be overcome by fear. When Jesus ascended into heaven, they must have been asking themselves, "What now?"

Then came the event which dramatically changed everything. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to them with a noise like a driving wind. The apostles saw flames as the Holy Spirit came to rest on each of them.

Peter, who not so long ago had been a total coward, was now proclaiming Jesus publicly and boldly, converting thousands at a time to Christianity. He was curing the sick just by his shadow coming over them as he passed them by. The other apostles also acted with a newfound courage, even praising God for when they were punished for promoting Christianity. Eventually, all of them but John died a martyr's death.

What happened to the apostles provides the same formula for our lives. Most of us reach a point in our lives when we are complacent with where we are in our faith. We may not think we're the greatest, but we don't feel a need to go any deeper, to grow in our faith.

If we're lucky, something happens that makes us realize our faith is far from what it should be. Maybe we go through a crisis of some kind and find that our faith is inadequate. Maybe we meet someone whose faith is stronger and they inspire us.

However it happens, we realize that, like the apostles at the time of the Passion of Jesus, our faith is not as strong as it should be.

This realization is actually a great gift. The realization that our faith is inadequate can motivate us, maybe for the first time in our lives, to ask the Lord to help us grow in our relationship with Him. Following the example of the apostles, perhaps we will even call out for the Holy Spirit to come to us, to fill us with a new and deeper intimacy with Jesus, a new sense of the power of His presence and His grace working in our lives.

Today and every day, we can ask the Holy Spirit to guide us as we seek to grow in our knowledge of the Bible and the teachings of the Church. We can ask the Holy Spirit to guide us and inspire us in our prayer life.

I struggle to do all this myself. Even though I have experienced extraordinary blessings in my life, I still have a lot of trouble really trusting God. No matter what God has done for me in the past, I have a fear of what might be around the next curve.

Let's pray.

Lord, our bishop has called all of us in his pastoral letter to grow deeper in our Catholic faith, so that we may grow in communion and intimacy with You.

Let us never be complacent with the level of our faith, but by the power of Your Holy Spirit, take us deeper in our knowledge and love of You, stronger in our commitment to know and follow the Bible and the teachings of Your Church, and more intentional and consistent in our prayer life. Let us always be conscious of our dependence on you. May we look to You and trust You in every challenge that comes our way.

Amen.