

JMJ CHS

It's now May and we are honoring Mary, the Blessed Mother of Jesus, and our Jewish mother. You know, she was there with the disciples in the beginning, in the upper room on Pentecost when they received the Holy Spirit. And she also witnessed some of the early growing pains of the new Church. Several thousand people were added at one time on Pentecost alone. And with the help of the Holy Spirit, we continued to grow after that, spreading worldwide.

And so the Apostles quickly learned that they just couldn't do it all. They were spending far too much time in the kitchen, feeding people and cleaning up afterwards, when what they really needed to be doing was to pray and break bread (say Mass) and heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and cast out demons. They needed help and so they began looking for a few good men. Seven were brought forth, and the Apostles laid hands on them (ordained them) and so we had the very beginnings of the diaconate. And it's too bad our Deacon Jerry isn't here today to celebrate the origins of his ministry with us. We know from the very beginning that deacons would be called upon to do much more than clear tables and wash dishes. Among those first deacons was Stephen who was destined to be the very first martyr of the Church. And there would be many more like him throughout the years.

Today I would like to talk about St. Stephen and his great charism as a deacon. He may have been very good in the kitchen, but we remember him as a martyr; a courageous and heroic man of faith. He stood before the Sanhedrin, and confronted Evil. He defended Jesus. And it cost him his life. And so, with him, began the first persecution of the Church, and it continues to this very day.

We had a Parish mission last week and our guest, Doug Barry, and he told us to Be Prepared. I thought he did a very good job of informing us about what has been, and what he thinks is yet to come. First off, the experts have already pointed out that there were more martyrs in the 20th century than all of the previous years of Christianity combined. But in just the past two years, attacks on our churches have dramatically increased. Destruction of property. Vulgar, satanic graffiti painted on churches. Sacrilege towards our statues and shrines. And yes, even actual physical assaults on all kinds of Christians.

I remember watching a news report a few years ago showing the brave Catholics of St. Louis Missouri who rushed downtown to protect the statue of their patron saint, St. Louis. It was really a confrontation between them and us. Catholics vs. the mob. Good vs. Evil. They wanted to destroy that statue and we were resolved to protect what was ours. We could call this a modern day, mini-version of *The Crusades*, but without the shedding of blood..... At least his time.

But it wasn't too long ago, and not that far away, in Mexico, that there was something called *The Cristeros War* where much blood was shed. There was a persecution of the faith but the heroic Catholics of that time took up arms against their persecutors, and they

won. The evil bully, in that case was the Mexican government, which was controlled by the freemasons.

A while back in one of my homilies I reminded you of a time in the distant past when the *Chosen People*, the Jews, lamented that they didn't have any priest, or prophet, or leader to help them through difficult times. And I said that the times that we are going through now seem to be the same. No "Pope John Pauls" or "Benedicts". No "Billy Grahams" or "Mother Teresas". I'm prepared to moderate my opinion and say that there does seem to be growing numbers of people out there on the horizon who are indeed speaking out courageously. I think Doug Barry is one of those people. But there are other personalities that might be someone who can encourage us along in these matters.

One person I've mentioned in the past is Rabbi Jonathan Cahn. He is the author of the best-selling Harbinger books. He is a messianic Jew, meaning that he is a Jew who became a Christian. I first heard him 8 years ago when he gave a hellfire and brimstone sermon to many of our national leaders underneath the Capitol Dome in Washington DC (it's on our website in the media section and you can also find it easily on YouTube. Check it out.) And his warning was, we had better get our act together as a nation. Or else. We need to be praying more and living the Christian life, not to mention repenting of many of the things we've done that offend God. And we need to be heroic witnesses to the faith. Not being worried about political correctness, or what others might think, but to stand up for the truth, as the deacon Stephen did.

And then recently there was the case of the popular news journalist who got fired. Just before his firing, he gave a talk and he said some very interesting things, but the bottom line was that he said that we have Evil in our country, not to mention our world. And we need to pray. He said to the gathering, please take 10 minutes out of your busy day and pray for our country. This is pretty unusual stuff for secular journalists to say, but it appears he's seen the writing on the wall.

And many others have had it "up to here" as well, and they're finally speaking out.

All of these folks are courageous people, but of course their mission is to encourage us as well. But heroics don't come naturally. Courage requires courage. We're not confident. And the knees might be a little bit shaky, but we have to take a stand, and I think we can do it in different ways.

In some ways we priests have it kinda easy. I don't typically stand on street corners preaching, but I am ready, willing and hopefully able to explain and defend the faith should the need arise. And I do wear my clerics out in public. And sometimes I wear my *Chosen* hoodie as well. And lately I've been taking to wearing this flashy St. Benedict crucifix around my neck. (They say St. Benedict is a great champion against evil.) But any of these things could be the catalyst for a conversation that could lead to a conversion. I've had many good conversations, but nobody has ever said an unkind word to me. So far. But could that change? Someday soon? I'm personally worried that it will.

Doug Barry gave us a quote that I was already familiar with. It came from that Jesuit priest of Detroit some years ago, Fr. John Hardon. Some years ago, looking at “the lay of the land”, he once commented that “only heroic Catholics will be able to survive the coming “Tribulation”. I feel that we are only in the early stages of that difficult time and that we can expect things to get more difficult as time goes by.

So what can it mean to be a *Heroic* Catholic? I’ll close by giving you only one example. After that you can use your imagination. But many people come to me about their “dilemma”. Their son or daughter is getting married to someone of the same sex. Or maybe they’re just being married out there in some goofy location that is more “new-agey” than Christian. “Fr. John, I’m torn. What should I do?” they ask. “I raised my kids Catholic. Should I go? My conscience tells me to not go to the wedding. But how about to the reception?” “I don’t want to cause any more divisions in my family. I don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings. And above all, I don’t want to lose any contact with them. And they’ve threatened that they will disown me if I don’t come.”

Wow. That’s pretty manipulative. And also quite common these days as well. Well, I think I may have a solution. I think that they could go, even to the wedding, but I would suggest that they be prepared be prepared to make their own statement. You see this flashy little St. Benedict cross. I think they should wear one. I think you should all wear one. This will identify you as a Christian and show the people what you stand for.

But to really drive home the point, and to make it perfectly clear what you stand for, I think you ought to “*up the ante*” just a little bit; I think your crucifix ought to be a little bit bigger. How about this one? Put this one around your neck and wear it to the wedding. Or any place for that matter, and there should be no question as to where you stand on this, or any issue. And you shouldn’t have to “preach” a single word. And I dare them to take issue with you.

But, on the other hand, if someone should indeed confront you on your beliefs and your boldness, you just may have to work up your courage a bit, be heroic, and speak a word on God's behalf. What would you say? May I make another suggestion? You could offer them a quote from her, our Jewish Blessed Mother. Perhaps her most famous words, spoken at the Wedding Feast at Cana. Point to your cross and say, “*Do whatever He tells you.*”

+Fr. John