

*“What you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.”*

During the first three centuries of the Church, being a Christian was no easy thing. Christianity was illegal. The first thirty-three popes were all martyred. For over three hundred years, to lead the Church from the Chair of St. Peter simply meant to be killed. It's no wonder that there arose such a reverence for the office of the Pope in the Church.

Of course, it was not only the popes who became martyrs. Thousands of Christians from every walk of life – carpenters, farmers, mothers and fathers, tradesmen, and many others – were martyred, until Christianity was made legal in AD 313, with the Edict of Milan.

Once the Emperor Constantine joined the Church, Christianity became not just legal, but the religion of the Roman Emperor. Christian martyrs seemed a thing of the past. For hundreds of years thereafter, the Faith was wedded to the rule of empires, nations, and kingdoms throughout the world. Unfortunately, this led to a different problem. Martyrdom often took another form. Instead of people being sacrificed, the Truth was at times sacrificed for the sake of worldly peace. The Faith was sacrificed at the altar of the secular.

Even in our own day, God asks us Christians to consider such a form of martyrdom. He asks the members of His Church, to stand on guard. We do not know when the truth is going to be attacked. Have you ever been surprised by something you've come across in the media which takes the truth and twists it? Or a topic of the Church brought up in conversation, only to be met with laughs and jokes?

In today's Gospel Reading, Jesus says that what we receive within the walls of our parish churches we need to be willing to speak in public. When we hear someone putting down the Church's beliefs, we ourselves are being put down. The Church is the Body of Christ, and

we are all members of that Sacred Body. When the Body of Christ is attacked, her teachings ridiculed, or her rights suppressed, we must be willing to speak out and at times even act against what is false and unjust.

But how do we do that? Sometimes, just speaking out that a remark is offensive, makes someone understand his wrong-doing. Yet sometimes we may be challenged by another to defend what the Church teaches, and that demands that we understand the Faith. This raises another important point about Jesus' words in today's Gospel.

There may not be a saint in the history of the Church who has completely understood everything that there is to know about the Faith. Nonetheless, we must be willing to explain as much as we do know. Furthermore, we must be willing to learn more than what we currently know, whether we do this by reading, watching television shows that accurately teach about the Faith, or simply by holding a conversation with knowledgeable Catholics.

"Do not be afraid," Jesus assures us three times in today's Gospel. As Jesus assures us today, everything unfolds in His providence, under His watchful gaze – even the falling of the tiniest sparrow to the ground. Each one of us is precious to Him.

Of course, the greatest resource we have at our disposal is God, the Holy Spirit. Through Baptism we have received the Holy Spirit, and those of us who have been confirmed have been strengthened by the Spirit's seven gifts. *Four of these seven gifts- wisdom, understanding, counsel, and knowledge-strengthen the human intellect* to help us know the Faith: The other three gifts of the Holy Spirit strengthen the *human will* to help us spread the Faith: fortitude, piety, and fear of the Lord. All of these help us to speak Jesus' words in the light and to proclaim them on the housetops. Amen