

Crisis Crystallizes Identity – Homily September 12, 2021



Twenty years ago, our nation experienced something that most of us thought would never happen again in our history. That crisis challenged our nation's identity and the things we stand for. 9-11 challenged us to think about the things that really matter, the things that are worth fighting for.

Crisis has a way of crystallizing identity. In our young history there have been many moments of crisis. A Revolution, a Civil War, two World Wars, Depression, Racial Tensions, Political Tensions and Pandemics have challenged us to think seriously about what really matters. Our personal lives and spiritual lives parallel the highs and lows of the crises our country has experienced. A crisis challenges us to assess what we believe to be true. In times of turmoil and division we can always find the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. The prophetic voice of one who acts as the voice of conscience. Our readings today reflect such voices.

The events of 9-11 were a call to examine our conscience. These past several days and weeks there have been all kinds of reminders calling us to remember that event. To look back on the past 20 years and use those experiences to make sense of our current struggles and divisions. It is the search for a moral compass for a nation that seems to have lost its identity. Dr. Martin Luther King, a modern American prophetic voice offers some insights on our current crisis which are worth reflecting on. Dr. King described America's struggles and divisiveness in the following way...

“Since the founding fathers of our nation dreamed this noble dream, America has been something of a Schizophrenic personality tragically divided against herself.”

Dr. King saw the saw division of his time as the result of a nation that subordinated moral principles and God, to national and personal self-interest. A self-interest that was anchored in a Godless pride and arrogance. Michael W. Smith a contemporary Christian singer and song writer, reflecting on Dr. Kings words described the pride and arrogance that King saw as a loss of our Christian identity. The result of forgetting that we are a nation whose foundational anchor was in the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. In the song “Breakdown” Smith poses this question based on Dr. Kings insights... “Is this what we’ve now become?”

The question of Identity is at the heart of Jesus’ question to the Disciples... “Who do you say that I am?” Living the Disciples life is not easy. It is anchored in understanding one’s identity and the things that really matter... the things that are worth living and dying for. The authentic disciple’s identity must always be anchored in Christ... It is to be a servant who embrace God’s will... knowing that embracing God’s will brings suffering. It is the call to be one who is called to do more than just believe. One who acts on their beliefs, principles, and values. One who puts faith into action the way that Christ did. When Christ’s asks “who do you say that I am?” He is challenging his disciples and us to embrace our identity. Jesus clarifies the nature of our identity by anchoring that identity in the cross. We are called to lose our life for the Gospel. It is a call to empty ourselves for others as Christ has done for us.

Faith is a call to be intentional... To be deliberate, driven by purpose and anchored in the virtues, principles, and the values that Christ himself lived. Jesus does not call us to do anything he was not willing to do himself. What he calls us to face, he himself has already faced. He calls us to “deny ourselves.” Very simply to say no to self. To say no to our own natural love of ease and comfort. To say no to every course of action based on self-seeking and self-will. To unhesitatingly say yes to the voice and command of Christ. We must be able to say with Paul, “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.”

Belief that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, must impact our life. It is the daily call to confront the question of who Christ is for us. This belief must be

accompanied by works of courage, service, love, and compassion or it is empty. We are called to take up our cross and follow in Christ's footsteps. Always remembering that He is here with us. The source and summit of our worship, the Mass, is a memorial. It is a call to remember! To remember what Christ has done for us and the love he has for us.

If we want to change the identity of our nation than we must embrace our personal identities as disciples of Christ. We must be better Christian, better Catholics committed to doing as Christ did with joy and purpose. We must become conscious of our need of him and take up our cross and empty ourselves so that we can be filled with him. We empty ourselves in the certain knowledge and confidence that only Christ can save us and our country.

And so we pray... My dear Jesus, by the working of the heavenly gift that we are about to receive at this altar Take possession of our minds and bodies so that its effects overcome our own desires. Make us a light to our nation... in the hope that by our example, your will, will always prevail. We ask this through your Son our Lord, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you forever and ever. Amen

May God Bless You.