

Saturday Octave of Easter 2015 - Knights of Columbus Board Meeting

Introduction

Aesop, in one of his fables, give us this memorable phrase: "A man is known by the company he keeps." People know what kind of persons we are by the friends we make and keep.

In today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the leaders of the people pegged Peter and John as uneducated men who were performing astonishing deeds well above their pay grade. Little did these leaders know, however, that they paid Peter and John a wonderful compliment when "they recognized them as the companions of Jesus".

Companions of Jesus - nothing better could be said of us! So we might spend a few moments this morning reflecting on some of Jesus' companions when he walked the earth and what in fact it means for us to be his companions.

Not an Impossible Dream

To be recognized and truly to be companions of Jesus is indeed the best thing that could ever happen to us. Yet many people, even life-long Christians, can't imagine that they too could be Jesus' friends and co-workers. That is thought to be reserved for martyrs and mystics, not ordinary folks. As a result some see a personal relationship with the Lord as an unattainable goal. It's a bit like trying to win an Oscar or an Olympic Gold Medal.

Well, that's one of the devil's cleverest ploys. The Father of Lies whom we firmly rejected at the Easter Vigil and on Easter Sunday likes to make us think that, since holiness, i.e., friendship with Christ, is unattainable, spiritual mediocrity and tepidity will have to do. He speaks low in our ear knowing full well the dangers of being lukewarm disciples.

So, who were the Lord's companions when he walked the earth? It seems the Lord had a fondness for dining with sinners. It seems he had a special place in his heart for the poor, the sick, and the grieving. For his two top Apostles, Peter and John, he chose men who were regarded as uneducated. St. Paul would write of Jesus' followers in 1 Corinthians: "Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many of you were influential, not many of you were of noble birth."

And when the Lord rose from the dead, he appeared first to Mary Magdalen "out of whom he had driven seven demons" and he made her his messenger to "his companions, i.e., his apostles, who were mourning and weeping." These companions of Jesus proved to be hard of heart: they rejected not only Mary Magdalen's testimony but also the testimony of the two disciples to whom Jesus appeared as they were walking, as per the Emmaus story.

So let us be of good cheer. For the more we think about it, the more we realize that Jesus' earthly companions were indeed a motley crew. Yet he said to them, "I no longer call you slaves, but friends." for indeed he had revealed to them the saving designs of his Father's heart. So the way I have it figured, there has to be room even for someone like me on the Lord's team!

He Loved Us First

This doesn't mean, of course, that we can take discipleship lightly or companionship with the Lord for granted. It's possible to walk away from friendship with Jesus by rejecting his love and obstinately choosing what is opposed to the Gospel. It's also possible to allow our love for the Lord to cool down by degrees such that we wake up one morning completely estranged from him. Even then, I'm convinced the Lord reaches out to us in a thousand ways.

What is really beautiful about companionship with Jesus is that it is he who first seeks our companionship, not the other way around. St. John tells us that "God's love consists in this, not that we have loved God but that God has loved us first and sent his Son as an offering for our sins." Pope Francis in fact sums up the entire faith in those terms when he writes: "Jesus Christ loves you. He gave his life to save you. And now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen, and free you." When we read conversion stories, such as St. Augustine's, we find out that the

Lord is willing to work pretty hard to win us over. How wonderful that love has sought us out and found us.

Those who become Jesus' companions are a varied lot but we all have this in common: At some point, we said, "I believe" and we meant it. Perhaps it happened of a sudden or maybe Lord's love gradually overtook us. However it happens, there must be a moment when we agree to walk with Jesus. It's that moment when we say, "I believe", and mean it so much that we changed, and changed so much that we can say with St. Paul that we no longer live for ourselves but Christ lives in us. Before long we take on the features of the Christ of the Beatitudes.

Charity, Unity, Fraternity

As a rule we don't speak of "a companion" of Jesus, in the singular. It's true, of course, that Jesus calls us individually and that our faith is deeply personal but it is never private; it is shared with other companions of Jesus along the way. In fact, we need each other in living our discipleship and friendship with the Lord.

This brings us to the heart of our beloved Order, the Knights of Columbus, and to its principles of charity, unity, and fraternity. By living those principles robustly, members of the family of Knights of Columbus are rightly recognized "as the companions of Jesus". No doubt Father McGivney had this in mind when he founded the Order.

As we receive the Risen Lord in the Eucharist this morning, let us ask the Lord to remain with us so that we may be his friends, companions and witnesses. May we indeed be known by the company we keep!

Vivat Jesus!