Being faithful in our current culture

Brothers in the office of the Holy Ministry:

 It was a snapshot of the strange twist that has become all too ordinary in our current American culture. In the days after the NFL draft where one of the athletes kissed his same-sex companion when he learned that he was drafted, a debate has raged between those who celebrate such “freedoms” over against those who hold to traditional, Christian values.

 That debate surfaced last week when four commentators engaged in an energetic debate over the issue. One of the out spoken commentators lambasted another for holding on to her traditional values and not celebrating this “freedom”. The other defended her right to hold to traditional Christian values. However, the more liberal commentator harassed and belittled the other for being narrow-minded. Beleaguered, the more conservative commentator picked up her papers and left the stage. Sarcastically the other said, “Oh, you are leaving?” A bit later another commentator branded any who held traditional Christian values as being “extreme”.

 Our American culture has certainly taken a turn for the worse in recent years. At first those who advanced alternate lifestyles merely wanted acceptance. Now they demand celebration. If someone does not celebrate their “choice”, then we are branded as “extreme”. Values that formerly were held to as essential to our society are now scorned, for the sake of acceptance, freedom and celebration.

 Those who stand on the truths of Holy Scripture are certainly no stranger to such accusation. Once again, as has happened repeatedly in the history of the church, we find ourselves standing on the wrong side of the society, branded as “extremists” in the culture in which we live, all because we stand on the truths of Holy Scripture. That ought not to be a surprise to anyone of us. We find our Lord Jesus talking about that in various Gospels. He says to us in Matthew 10: “and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”

 What are we to do in such a society? Again our Lord Jesus provides us direction. At the end of Luke’s Gospel Jesus tells his disciples, and us: “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” Luke 24:46-48

 Ours is to be a message of Law and Gospel, sin and grace. We are not to temper the sting of the Law, nor are we to diminish the sweetness of the Gospel. We are called to proclaim the Law with all of its condemning force. Think of Paul’s words in Romans 1:

* Romans 1:29-32.They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

We are also, and most importantly, called to proclaim Christ, to confess Christ. That is what St. Peter did when he stood before the crowd of Pentecost. Remember his words?

* **Acts 2:23** This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.
* **Acts 2:38-39** Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

Then a short time later Peter proclaims much the same message as he stands in Solomon’s Portico after healing a paralytic. He says:

* **Acts 3:14-16** But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, **and** you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

These days we are the witnesses, our Lord’s witnesses. St. Paul’s words to the Philippians come to mind:

Philippians 2:14-16. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, **holding** fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

May our God bless us as we stand firm, proclaiming Christ, confessing Christ. May He bless us as He has blessed so many generations before us who have also stood firmly on His Word.

Have a blessed Pentecost!

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