

Faith in Christ is More Than a Once and For All Decision

A sermon by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on Trinity (also Confirmation) Sunday, June 11, 1995. Scripture Lessons: Proverbs 8:1-4; 22-31; Psalm 8; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

I don't want to throw cold water on the wonderful celebration of your confirmation, but this morning you will become martyrs. Do you know what a martyr is? (Ask for a response from the confirmation class). "Martyr" is the Greek word for "a witness". A witness is someone who testifies in a court of law.

The ancient Romans kept verbatim records of trials. As a result, we have the witness given by six members of a confirmation class along with their teacher. They were on trial in Rome because of their faith in Christ. The trial took place over 1,800 years ago, around AD 165. When the seven were brought into the court room, Rusticus, the Roman prefect, asks Justin, the teacher, "What doctrines do you teach?"

"We believe one God and our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God," Justin answers.

"Where do you meet with your class?" the prefect queries.

Justin says, "In my home."

"To come to the point then", Rusticus continues, "are you a Christian?"

"Yes, I am a Christian."

Then the prefect interrogates each of the six young Christians in the confirmation class. "Are you a Christian?" Each in turn responds, "I am a Christian."

The prefect continues, "Who taught you? Did Justin make you a Christian?"

A young person named Chariton replies, "I received of my parents this good confession." Another named Euelpistos, a slave, says, "I listened gladly to the words of Justin, but I too received Christianity from my parents."

When questioned as to where their parents were, one really gutsy member of the class named Hierax gave an answer that sounds a little smart-alecky to me, "Our true father is Christ and our mother our faith in Him."

Then the ^{Prefect} ~~governor~~ returns to Justin. "Listen, you that are said to be a learned man - if you are scourged and beheaded, do you think that you will ascend to heaven?"

Justin must have been a cocky guy because without the slightest sense of being intimidated, he responds with a kind of swagger, "I don't think (I'll ascend to heaven), I know and am fully persuaded."

"Enough of this", the prefect says, "I'm going to ask you to make a small sacrifice to the Roman gods. Make a small sacrifice and you don't have to die."

Justin courageously responds, "Are you crazy? No one in their right mind turns from true belief to false."

The prefect warns, "If you don't obey, you'll be punished without mercy."

Justin calmly answers, "If we're punished for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ we hope to be saved."

The six young members of the confirmation class agree, "Do what you will. For we are Christians and offer no sacrifice to idols."

The governor turns to the guards and says, "Let those who will not sacrifice to the gods be scourged and led away to be beheaded in accordance with the laws."

All seven were martyred. But some anonymous Christian added these words to the record: "The holy martyrs went out, glorifying God and were beheaded. They were confirmed in their testimony by the confession of their Saviour."

Did you year that? They were confirmed! Their faith was confirmed by their decision to follow Christ to their death. I tell you this bit of historical information to emphasize that faith is more than a once and for all decision. Saint Paul wrote that "since we are justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The true confirmation of that faith that puts us right with God gives us a hope that enables us endure to our life's end. The real confirmation of our faith, therefore, comes, not today, but at the end of our lives.

Today I will ask you these questions:

"Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world?

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love?

Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love?

Will you be a faithful member of this congregation, share in its worship and ministry through your prayers and gifts, your study and service, and so fulfill your calling to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?"

But at the end of our lives our Savior will ask,

"Have you trusted in the gracious mercy of God?

Did you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world?

Did you turn to me and accept me as your Lord and Savior, trusting in my grace and love?

Were you my faithful disciple, obeying my Word and showing my love?

Were you a faithful member of my Church, sharing in its worship and ministry through your prayers and gifts, your study and service?

Have you fulfilled your calling to be one of my disciples?"

This morning you will all become martyrs. You'll bear witness to your faith in Christ. Today and tomorrow and for the

rest of the days of your life you're going to be tempted to deny the faith you confess today. You'll be tempted to sacrifice your integrity to the god of expediency and do what's easy rather than what's right. You'll be tempted to sacrifice to Mammon and materialism and live for money and material comfort rather than costly obedience to Christ. You'll be tempted to sacrifice your chastity to the god of sex. One day you may even be faced with martyrdom. So the most important decision you'll ever make is your decision today and tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow to follow Christ to your life's end.

Let us pray: Defend, O Lord, your servants with your heavenly grace, that they may continue yours forever, and daily increase in your Holy Spirit more and more, until they come to your everlasting kingdom. Amen.