

October 18, 2015 The Cup Homily

My brothers and sisters, since my early childhood, I have been an avid and enthusiastic reader of detective fiction (mystery stories). Some of you may be of an age to remember the popularity of The Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew Mysteries. More recently, I've developed a passion for the novels of the late English writer Agatha Christie. What is worth noting is that in many of her stories a simple cup or chalice affords the detective, Hercule Poirot, some much needed evidence in order to solve the case. The cup contains a lethal drug. The one who drinks from the cup is the victim. He or she has been poisoned. It is the cup of death!

In today's gospel Jesus offers challenging words to two of his disciples. "Can you drink the cup that I drink?" (Mk.10:38).

Let us now consider the background. Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem. For the third time He has spoken openly of his impending passion and death. (Mk.10:32-34). The disciples seem oblivious to his words. Two brothers are seeking to secure for themselves the top posts in the Messiah's future government. Their requests betray a degree of selfishness. To sit at a ruler's right or left was in biblical times a sign of prestige and power. But what of the cup? According to two Jesuit biblical scholars, Fathers Donahue and Harrington, the image of the cup is best understood in terms of the Old Testament theme of the cup of suffering.

While in the garden of Gethsemane on the night before his death Jesus offered an anguished prayer to His heavenly Father: "My Father, if it is possible, let this chalice (or cup) pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Mk.14:36). In the face of torture and a hideous death, Jesus didn't feel he could drink the cup filled with sorrows. But, as we know, Jesus drank his chalice to the bitter end!

Jesus' mention of a cup recalls to mind the mystery of the Last Supper. His words are repeated at every Mass "And having taken the chalice, giving thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank of it" (Mk. 14:23). In his letter to the Christian community at Corinth, Paul shares his thoughts on the Eucharistic mystery. He writes: "The chalice of benediction, is it not the communion of the Blood of Christ.(1 Cor.10:16).

It is important that we pause to reflect on Our Lord's words to his disciples. Those very same words are addressed to us as well. They are certainly bracing words. "The cup that I drink, you will drink" (Mk.10:39). No one in this church is excluded! How many Christians have drained the cup of suffering? Just consider the terrified Christian minorities in the Middle East. What of devoted Christians whose family members either have abandoned or no longer practice the faith? And what of the gravely ill or the terminally ill?

As we continue with this Mass let us give thanks for the "Bread of life" and the Cup of Salvation". Holy Communion is truly life-giving and a marvelous gift of Jesus.

In closing, let us remember that the disciples held the cup and drained it in imitation of Jesus. Those who wish to share the glory of Christ must also share his sufferings. Are we willing to lose our life for the sake of Jesus and of his gospel? And so the final words of this homily are in the form of a question: Can you drink the cup that I drink?

Amen.