

February 16, 2014 The Law of Christ Homily

Dear brothers and sisters, in the history of the Jews one of the most celebrated figures is one Hananiah Ben Teryadon, a rabbi known for his learning, wisdom and courage. In 145 A.D. the venerable rabbi was condemned to death for the capital crime of teaching Torah in the public square. For his effrontery of teaching the Law of Moses (first five books of the Old Testament) Rabbi Hananiah was sentenced to die at the stake.

On the day of his execution, the executioners were ordered to wrap the old man in the Holy Scrolls (the parchment in which the Word of God is inscribed). Moments after he was torched, one of his students turned to him before he lost consciousness. He asked: "Rabbi, what do you see now? The rabbi replied: "The scrolls are burning but the letters are indestructible-untouched, unharmed. They are flying up to heaven, they are returning to heaven".

The rabbi reminded his young student that the enemy has power only over the parchment scrolls. The letters of the Torah-the spirit of Torah are eternal-beyond the reach of the enemies of Israel. The Word of the Lord abides forever!

For the Jews the Torah was the proof of God's special love for Israel. God did not give the law to any other people. When rabbis of old were asked, "What is God doing in heaven, their response was "Reading Torah"! In one of the Old Testament psalms one reads, "Your word is a lamp for my steps and a light for my path".

In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ appears as one greater than Moses, He proclaims a new law with great authority and brings Old Testament expectations to fulfillment in his life and teachings. In our Gospel reading today, Christ declares "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill" (Mt. 5:17). Christ boldly claims to have the actual authority of God, the source of the Law. ("It was said to them of old", "But what I say to you"). Moses went up Mt. Sinai to receive the Law of God and to bring it to the chosen people. The Eternal Word, Jesus Christ came down from heaven, to lead us to heaven! Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life. On the evening before his death, Jesus prayed the following words: "I have given them the Words which you gave me" (Jn. 17:8).

Our secular culture has been poisoned by too much chatter and mindless entertainment. We have been subjected to (among other things) talk radio, talk TV, talking heads and texting. Perhaps we need to interrupt all the endless chatter and cry out "Let Christ speak!" We recall the words of St. Peter "Lord, you have the Words of everlasting life". (Jn.6:68).

As we anticipate the season of Lent, let us familiarize ourselves with the Word of God. Let us make a conscious effort to acquaint ourselves with the teachings of Christ. Let us walk the path of truth and righteousness. As disciples of Jesus, let us pray that the Holy Spirit grant us His wisdom and peace.

Amen