

## Homily for Monday in the Seventh Week after Pentecost

July 13, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Year 2, Proper 10: Isaiah 1:10–17; Psalm 50:7–15; Matthew 10:34–11:1*

Today we hear the conclusion of the second sermon preached by Jesus in Matthew. It's called the Mission Sermon<sup>1</sup> or the Disciples Discourse.<sup>2</sup> Professor Ulrich Luz writes that the discourse is “almost exclusively about the disciples’ behavior and fate.”<sup>3</sup>

I was surprised to read Luz’s comments on the very first verse of today’s gospel lesson, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”<sup>4</sup> He wonders if Jesus is contradicting his words in the Sermon on the Mount: “I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”<sup>5</sup>

Count me with the late Jesuit scholar Father Daniel Harrington. He wrote, “the saying simply calls

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 182–83.

<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 64–65.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 10:34.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 5:39.

attention to the decision required for or against the gospel, and the division among people that is a consequence of that division.”<sup>6</sup> If you are a Muslim, living in many, many places in this world, you will suffer for becoming a Christian. In Malaysia, for example, your conversion won’t be recognized, and you will not be able legally to marry a Christian.<sup>7</sup>

There is a section in our Prayer Book for commemorations for saints who are not in the Episcopal Church’s calendar. I’ll read the list in reverse order: Of a Saint, Of a Monastic, Of a Theologian and Teacher, Of a Pastor, Of a Missionary, and, first on the list, Of a Martyr.

Peter Brown’s work on early martyrdom, especially the lectures published as *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, remains essential for our understanding of the emergence of Christianity and the Christian community in the first centuries of the Christian Era. To be a Christian was to live in danger of ill-treatment, torture, and cruel deaths. To die for Christ meant truly to be baptized into Christ’s death

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), 150.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/religious-conversion-and-sharia-law>, (accessed 13 July 2020).

and resurrection—no washing with water required.<sup>8</sup> The bodies of martyrs became, and remain, places of pilgrimage and prayer.<sup>9</sup>

For me, the most important words of Jesus we heard today are these—I quote Luz’s translation because it reflects the inclusive wording of the Greek. Jesus said, “Whoever receives you receives me and whoever receives me, receives him who sent me.”<sup>10</sup>

Here we have words that, though not explicitly Trinitarian, will come to be understood in the experience of union believers will have with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At the end of Matthew, Jesus’ last words to the eleven who remained faithful, “And behold I am with you all days until the close of the age.”<sup>11</sup>

The first and extraordinary sign of God’s presence in this building is the presence of those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, for whom the Word

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<sup>8</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), s.v. “Baptism,” 881.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 1–22.

<sup>10</sup> Luz, 119.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 615.

of God is alive in this life and sustaining for the life of the world to come.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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