

## MARCH 21 2026 FATHER ERNESTO DE CICCIO

Time and again, the authorities, the scribes, the Pharisees, the high priests, find reasons not to believe in Jesus, not to accept Jesus. Today's reason is he's from Galilee. What does Galilee produce? Certainly not prophets, certainly not a Messiah. They had closed their hearts. They couldn't even give Jesus a chance.

Of course, they challenged him because, in their eyes, he was breaking the Sabbath, and that got him in trouble too. And they don't just judge Jesus, but they judge all the others who are believing in Jesus. They accuse the police, they accuse Nicodemus. They say these funny things: "Surely you have not been deceived too, have you?" "Surely you're not also from Galilee, are you?" And interestingly enough, they don't respond.

It reminds me of Peter. Remember on Holy Thursday night, how when people challenged Peter about being a follower of Jesus, he says, "I do not know the man." Nobody wants to be associated with him. It does take courage to stand up. It takes a lot of courage to say, "I believe."

A few nights ago, I decided to watch on TV a movie that came out about 10 years ago, called Silence. It's based on a book that I actually read over 40 years ago, by Shusaku Endo. And it recounts some of the story of the Japanese martyrs. They had courage, as martyrs did in so many other countries, Korea, Vietnam, all over the world. They believed. And they didn't deny it. Even at the cost of their life.

Do we have that courage? To stand up and be counted. To say, "Yes, I'm one of them." We're not going to be nailed to crosses. And yet, people will make fun of us. They'll put us down. Has anybody ever come to you and said: "You're not still going to church, are you?!" "You don't

believe that mumbo-jumbo? After all the messiness that's even happened all over the world with the Church?!"

People will raise all sorts of stuff. Yes, we know there's been a clergy sex-abuse scandal. We know the story of residential schools. Terrible things that have happened for 2,000 years. Crusades, inquisitions... We. Still. Believe. Because we still know that Jesus is the Christ. The Messiah, the Son of God. And what Jesus has left us, by the way, is the Church. He didn't write the New Testament himself. He gave us the Church, that community of believers.

And we should not be ashamed to be seen walking in to attend a Mass, to hear God's word, and receive the sacraments. The police were challenged. Nicodemus was challenged. And maybe they were afraid of what the consequences might be if they said, "Yes, I believe." "Yes, I am one of them."

We should take courage from the example of so many brave men, women, even children, who were willing to give up their whole life out of love for Christ. I don't think too many of us are going to die as martyrs. But, yes, people will laugh at us, scorn us, put us down. Simply for wearing a crucifix around our chain, or having a rosary hanging from our rear-view mirror.

We should be proud of being followers of Jesus Christ. We don't deny that the Church is messy sometimes. It's the truth. But still, it's Christ's gift to all of us. And by being part of that community, we're better people. Because we belong to the family. A family of faith. A family that supports us, in our own times of trial. A family that shares our belief. A family that practices so much love, and does so much good, out there, in the community, and around the world.

So stand up, and be counted. Don't be afraid when people challenge you, and make fun of you, and say, "You're not one of those!" You just say, "Yes, I am! And I'm proud of it." And if it comes to it, hopefully like the martyrs, "I'll give my whole life for it."