

MAY 9, 2026 MSGR. SAMUEL BIANCO

“Persecuted me.”

Jesus was mocked, he was laughed at, they teased him, they provoked him, they tried to shame him.

In almost an echo of what has happened in our century, he was followed about by people who were trying to catch him out, in something that he said, that they could use to pin against him. They were constantly harassing him in every way they possibly could, to bring him down. And finally, they harassed him, and pushed him so much they made him suffer, and they persecuted him to the point of death. It was so then, and it is so now.

And he was persecuted, I think, first, because he spoke the truth. He said, "And am I, "a man who come to you and speaks the word from God." We can puzzle at the reasons of why that would upset people. Partially, I think, it's a spiritual envy. When you are in a position of leadership, spiritual, or intellectual, or cultural, and someone else is able to bring the truth so powerfully, to bring life to people, and they do it better than you do, in a way that's more eloquent and more efficacious, lots of people get envious. And they resent that someone can be so effective and so good, and I think that's an element with people who observe Jesus, that they resented that he was so effective in communicating the truth about life, and the way of life, and what was good and bad.

I think they also persecuted him because he spoke the truth without violence. "Peter, put the sword back in its sheath." That didn't mean that Jesus was passive, not at all. He knew that there was a danger, that his life was threatened. But he had a determination that existed and lasted all the days of his life. Nothing could stop him from his mission. You could intimidate, you could threaten him. He would never respond, as so often

you and I do when we get frustrated, with anger and violence. He was always peaceful, but persistent and determined.

And then most beautifully, I think Jesus was persecuted because he blessed those who persecuted him. It becomes, later, an echo in Saint Paul, doesn't it? When Saint Paul says, when people are your enemies, give them food and drink. It's like pouring coals onto a fire. In other words, you're responding to them not in a destructive way. And Jesus tells you and me, "Bless those who persecute you. Bless them and don't curse them." And he does that because in a marvellous way, coming from God, and being God, he sees in persecutors something of good. He sees in persecutors the possibility to change and be better.

Now all this takes place in the world that Jesus knew. When we read the Gospel of John and we hear Jesus talk about the word world, the world can be something neutral, it's neither good nor bad. Or it can be a world that God created. God's, so all he made was good. And it can also be a world that the Second Vatican Council said is cut through, with lots of malice and vanity. And the world that Jesus is talking about to his disciples today is that world. A world that has been good, but's been corrupted by evil and malice.

And the disciples and all of us are subject to that kind of world, and we have to be aware of it, and to know it. That doesn't mean we abandon the world, or try to escape. It just means that this is an opportunity to make the world better, to see that there's a conversion. Not to run away from troubles, not to run away from evil, but do all the things that Jesus did, to try to make the world better.

He uses the words "persecuted me." And you remember in the beatitudes Jesus says-- in the last judgement, he says: "Whoever gives a cup of cold water, or food, or drink, to one of the least of these members of my family, does it to me." Well we can take that as meaning to say: Whoever is persecuted, whatever member of the human family is

persecuted, they're actually persecuting Jesus as well. Not only them as individuals. Because we're all members of the same family.

And that persecution includes all people. You know why people are persecuted today. We could list the categories. Race, a gender, status, economic position, language, creed, culture. All of those are categories that people use to go out, and to attack others. And part of it is because they feel that those other categories or those ways of doing, are a threat to their status, to their position, to their will, to whoever they are, to their identity. And that was in Jesus' time, and it's in our time today.

When we see categories like race, and creed, and gender, and ethnic background, and religion, Jesus teaches us not to see they're a challenge, but the bounty, the diversity of God's creation. I mean, in human terms, he saw that, that the harvest was great. Well the harvest of life is extraordinarily great. All the different kinds of people, we're meant to come together, and to be together, and build up the community.

How do we do that and avoid troubles and problems? Here's what Pope Francis says: "Whenever any minority is persecuted and marginalized "because of religious convictions or ethnic identity, "the wellbeing of society as a whole is endangered, "and each one of us must feel affected."

So we say to ourselves, and to all people, if you're persecuted or you're threatened, because of your identity or who you are, you need to know that Jesus is with you. He's close and intimate. You also need to know that he identifies with you. And he doesn't want that to happen to you, and he wants that to be relieved. And he also wants all of us, whoever we are, not to engage in that kind of persecution, but to do all we can in our power and strength to make sure that people aren't persecuted. Because who they are, because of their race, because of their gender, because of their religion, or identity.

All of us are God's children, and God wants us all, as much as possible on this earth, to live together in harmony.