

DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

Objectives

To understand what it means to be a Christian in today's world and where our sphere of influence lies

References

Holy Scripture

Scriptural Verse

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matthew 5: 14)

Lesson Guidelines

Matthew 5:14-19

Our Lord has asked us to be light unto the world and a city set on a hill. These two objects are very obvious, they cannot be missed. A city set on a hill can be seen miles away. Light pierces the darkness and does not intermingle with it. The two cannot coexist. So how come most of us can be with a group of people and never really stand out as Christians?

Some reasons:

- We are too embarrassed to admit we are Christian, that we follow a certain doctrine and live a certain way of life for fear of rejection, or ridicule.
- We are too shy to reveal our beliefs feeling that it makes us reveal too much about ourselves and who we are and maybe make us vulnerable in front of others.
- We believe that in order to be humble we must not show our righteousness.
- We don't want others to feel uncomfortable around us; if they know we are Christians they may behave differently.
- We don't know enough about our beliefs so we don't answer when we are questioned.
- We feel awkward sharing our Orthodoxy because it is less known or common.
- Living double lives with double standards without really ever knowing it.
- However, we must realize that one characteristic all Christians **MUST** have is the courage and boldness to be different. Why do we have to be different? Why can't our relationship with God be a personal experience? Our relationship with God can be personal but our convictions and beliefs must not. Why?

2 Corinthians 2:14-16

So we must spread the knowledge of God to both believers and non-believers even if it is uncomfortable for us and for those who are listening. We have a mission in life and that is to bring others to the knowledge of God. We are called to be different not just for the sake of being different but so that our difference will lead others to the Lord Jesus Christ when they see that we have the courage to disassociate ourselves from a sinful world. Many of us don't think of our lives as missionaries but we really are.

Being different is not easy and it goes against what the majority of people would do or what would come naturally to them. **THERE IS A RISK INVOLVED**

There was a German soldier who was injured during the Second World War on the Russian front. The other soldiers left the place without realizing that he was injured. He crawled until he arrived to a small house. He knocked. An old Russian lady opened up for him. She cleaned his injury, offered him food and bed to sleep. Four days passed by, and the soldier was unable to understand why this enemy is taking good care of him whilst endangering her own life for him. Finally he saw an icon of St. Mary in her bedroom. He realized that she was Orthodox. He left the house for the German frontier. Unfortunately for him, he had lost his way and returned to the same place. He found the house in ruin, the old lady had gone. He inquired about her. He was told that the soldiers found out about her helping an enemy, they destroyed her house and sent her to prison. He managed to go and see her. She was happy and cheerful because God had used her as an instrument of His love to change the life of another person. The soldier became a priest in his country and he is still alive today.

A few years ago an experiment was conducted with teenagers which was designed to show how a person handled group pressure. The plan was simple. They brought groups of ten adolescents into a room for a test. Subsequently, each group of ten was instructed to raise their hands when the teacher pointed to the longest line on three separate charts. What one person in the group did not know was that nine of the others in the room had been instructed ahead of time to vote for the second-longest line. Regardless of the instructions they heard, once they were all together in the group, the nine were not to vote for the longest line, but rather vote for the next to the longest line. The experiment began with nine teenagers voting for the wrong line. The stooge would typically glance around, frown in confusion, and slip his hand up with the group. The instructions were repeated and the next card was raised. Time after time, the self-conscious stooge would sit there saying a short line is longer than a long line, simply because he lacked the courage to challenge the group. This remarkable conformity occurred in about 75% of the cases, and was true of small children and high-school students as well. Berenda concluded that, "Some people had rather be president than right," which is certainly an accurate assessment.

Yet each and every Christian is called to be different and to be a leader regardless of what your personality is like. Let's look at some examples:

Athanasius, early bishop of Alexandria, stoutly opposed the teachings of Arius, who declared that Christ was not the eternal Son of God, but a subordinate being. Hounded through five exiles, he was finally summoned before emperor Theodosius, who demanded he cease his opposition to Arius. The emperor reproved him and asked, "Do you not realize that all the world is against you?" Athanasius quickly answered, "Then I am against all the world."

Discussion

How do we remain different?

1. Watching the Company that we keep – 1 Corinthians 15:33, Proverbs 2:20, Proverbs 22:24. Does it seem contradictory that God is asking us to be a light to the world but to avoid evil company? In regards to our close and intimate relationships then we should be very picky as to whom we associate with so as not to be brought down by others. For example, it's not correct to marry a nonbeliever or someone with a drinking problem for the sake of bringing them to the faith because more than likely that's not going to happen. However, we are not called to avoid the world around us in our every day dealings, at work, school, our acquaintances, and at church. This is where we need to stand out.
2. Your mission is to spread the knowledge of God. Remember your mission daily. If we live our lives with that mindset then our words and behavior will be different.
3. Do not be afraid of rejection and ridicule by others but rather expect it (Luke 21:17-18). This verse is repeated three other times in the Gospels and bears much truth. However, God comforts us through the promise that He is our defender. Expect rejection from people but trust in God's ultimate acceptance of you. Noah for example was the only righteous man in his generation, though the whole world was destroyed, he and his family were saved.
4. Our Lord tells us how we are supposed to accomplish being different in Matthew 10:16. He says that we are to be wise in doing good but simple in doing evil. To be simple in doing evil means to reject everything around me that does not conform to His will but still being loving, meek and merciful to all people.

Conclusion

We are called to be leaders in this world and not followers when it comes to our beliefs and convictions. It takes a lot of courage to be different but with perseverance the results will be spreading the word of God and pleasing our Lord (Matthew 25:21).