

All Christians are Ambassadors for Christ

(Matthew 10:34-42)

On the night of Jesus' birth the angels proclaimed to the shepherds, "On earth peace to men on whom His favour rests," (Luke 2:14). Jesus, the Prince of peace, came to establish peace between God and sinful humanity. He reconciled us to God by offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice to atone for all sins. Yet the majority of this world's people prefer to think that they can do what is necessary to establish their own peace with God, and they resent anyone who tells them anything different. That is why a consequence of Jesus' coming is not peace, but a sword.

Enemies of Christ are hostile toward Christians, and sometimes that hostility even leads to bloodshed. Sadly, the unbelievers' victims may even be members of their own households. In order to avoid such bad blood within the family circle, Christians are tempted to hide their faith or even to deny their Lord. But anyone who is more concerned about his relationship with his relatives than about his relationship with his Lord is making a disastrous choice.

In today's Gospel Jesus asks us to bear our cross (Matt. 10:38). The cross Jesus asks us to bear is not a reference to troubles and sufferings in general, but only to suffering that we are called upon to endure because of our faith. Some Christians are called upon to bear much heavier crosses than others, but our Lord promises that He will give us the strength we need, so that our crosses will not overwhelm us but bring us closer to our Saviour. To lose one's life for Jesus' sake is to give oneself completely into His hands, body and soul (v.39). It is to make oneself a living sacrifice to the Lord. In the process, the Christian lives abundantly now and will live in eternal glory with his Saviour hereafter. But those who concentrate on the things of this life jeopardise their eternal salvation. He who gains the whole world but loses his soul has made a poor bargain indeed!

Jesus concludes His instructions to His disciples by pointing out how they will be a blessing to others (v. 40-42). Those who welcome and provide for Jesus' messengers are serving the Lord Himself, and He will acknowledge and graciously reward that service. A prophet's reward or a righteous man's reward is not eternal salvation. We do not earn heaven by anything we do for God or for any of God's messengers. We rather share in the blessings they receive through the Word of God: peace with God, patience in time of tribulation, confidence to pray, and the like. We receive eternal salvation through faith in Christ alone, but here Jesus speaks of the blessings with which God graciously rewards our fruits of faith, our good works, even such a simple gesture as giving a cup of cold water to a thirsty child. When we do this as an expression of our Christian faith, God is pleased, and He will find a way to reward us. We may forget, but our Lord will remember every act of service. But anyone who does so-called deeds of charity in order to gain recognition or some other reward will be sadly disappointed. Without faith it is impossible to please God, and faith does not seek recognition.

All Christians are ambassadors for Christ, whether they are full-time workers in Christ's church or

earning their living in some other occupation. So we all do well to remember and ponder the warnings, the instructions, and the promises Jesus gave His disciples when He sent them out to invite people into His kingdom.