

Will Stanley
Friday, March 7, 2008
Homily for 7 am Daily Lenten Eucharist
St. Columba's Episcopal Church, Washington, DC
Psalm 34:15-22; Wisdom 2:1, 2-24; John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

What am I willing to do, or not do, to express my faith? What am I willing to sacrifice...to risk? Do I wholeheartedly believe and live the faith that I profess?

Ever since I received an e-mail from the Rev. Rose Duncan at the start of Lent last month, inviting me to be one of the Lenten preachers, I have been asking myself these questions. And I continue to keep them in my thoughts and prayers. I encountered one situation where I had to ask myself all of them.

The day after Ash Wednesday, I found myself at a crossroad. In a first period English class, a discussion concerning the rationality of God and faith broke out in relation to the book we were reading, *Brave New World* by English author Aldous Huxley. During the back-and-forth a fellow classmate of mine, an atheist, boldly claimed that "anyone who believed in God was just simply wrong and 'superstitious'," knowing full well that everyone else in the room were people of faith.

As I became irritated at the idea of being called "superstitious", my three Lenten questions began to enter my mind. And also, I thought of this morning's gospel from John, as I had just read it in Rose's first e-mail the day before on Ash Wednesday.

"...The one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me" (John 7: 28-29).

This is the bold claim "cried out" by Jesus in the temple. While my classmate's claim and Jesus' are very, very different in content, the circumstances surrounding both of the statements are strikingly similar.

Jesus, a young Jew from Nazareth, was very much in the minority when he traveled to Jerusalem for the festival of Booths, also known as the feast of the Tabernacles. Surrounded by Orthodox Jewish authorities, he "spoke openly", as John says - challenging the status quo that surrounded him - just like my classmate did in that early morning English class. With this context in my mind, I ultimately decided not to "lay hands" on my classmate and attack his opinion, but rather, I tried my best to "show how gentle I was," as Wisdom says, and simply keep to myself...for I knew that "none who trust in him will be punished" (Psalm 34: 22).

I'll leave you this morning with an excerpt from a meditation for this, the Friday of the Fourth week of Lent, by a parishioner of Trinity Church Wall

Street in New York City, who asks to be directed by the same questions that I seek:

"Oh Lord when I pray, let me open both my heart and my brain to the possibilities of your answers. And let me trust you enough to be guided by them."

Amen.