

Twenty-seventh Sunday of the Year – Cycle A
St. Francis of Assisi Parish – Belchertown, MA
October 7-8, 2017



Scripture Readings: Isaiah 5: 1-7 ✧ Psalm 80 ✧ Philippians 4: 6-9 ✧ Matthew 21: 33-43

Ignaz Semmelweis was a doctor in Austria in the 1800s. As he practiced medicine with mothers and their children, he came up with a theory that caused a great deal of controversy among other doctors: he said that germs cause disease. As a young doctor in Vienna, he was distraught that so many mothers who delivered their babies in the hospital either lost their babies or their own lives. These were poor people. The wealthy still had their babies at home and their rate of illness and death was much lower.

As he observed procedures at the hospital, Dr. Semmelweis suspected that it was actually the doctors who were spreading infection. The doctors, he observed, never washed their hands before examining a patient – regardless of what they were doing beforehand.¹

Doctors were insulted by Semmelweis' assertions and his insistence that the doctors wash their hands thoroughly between patients and procedures. Many doctors mocked him even as they followed his directives. But the rate of infections and deaths dropped dramatically and, to this day, his simple suggestion has become required practice in the world of medicine.

Nonetheless, Dr. Semmelweis was never hailed as hero in his lifetime. He continued to be questioned, ridiculed, and rejected. He became very depressed, aged quickly, and he finished his career at a hospital in Budapest, dying at age 47, a sad and broken man.²

As God's faithful people, we have probably experienced the fact that faith can be a very difficult thing to live out in our lives. Truly standing up for our faith can take a toll on us. In sometimes subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle ways, we can face ridicule, rejection, anger, lies and even abuse when we stand up for our faith and other feel threatened by this.³

This is nothing new in the course of human history and in the history of our Church. In our Gospel passage today, Jesus uses the parable of the vineyard

owner to illustrate how God has continued to send prophets and even his own Son to tell the truth of His goodness and providence. It seems that someone always steps in attempting to thwart the message of truth they came to bring but, like the vineyard owner, God is very patient and persistent and continues to speak the truth through those who follow Him and have the courage to speak the truth.

We see this same kind of patience and persistence in the person of Jesus. The same gentle Jesus who said to the people, "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart (*Matthew 11:29*)." also "made a whip out of cords" and drove the money changers from the Temple (*John 2:15*). And the same loving Jesus who said, "Everyone who acknowledges me before others the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God," also said, "But whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God (*Luke 12:8-9*)."

We, too, need to be people who model for others the patience, goodness and love of God, while still being persistent in the call to speak the truth, especially in the face of rejection and ridicule.

As we seek to know the truth of our faith and the courage to live it out in every facet of our lives, let us close with part of a prayer by Pope Clement XI:

*LORD, I believe in you. Give me a firmer faith.
I hope in you; give me surer hope.
I love you; make me love you more and more.*

*I adore you as my first Beginning,
and long for you as my last End.
I praise you as my constant Benefactor,
and call upon you as my gracious Protector.*

*Guide me in your wisdom,
restrain me by your justice,
comfort me by your mercy,
defend me by your power.*

*I offer you my thoughts, to be fixed on you;
my words, to have you as their theme;
my actions, to be done according to your will.⁴ ✧*

¹ Kurt Vonnegut, Commencement Address, Southampton College, circa May, 1981

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignaz_Semmelweis

³ Inspired by Jay Cormier, "Connections", October, 2002

⁴ Pope Clement XI, 1649-1721