

A week ago Saturday, there was a rally held in Washington, DC called, "The Rally for Reason." It was really a rally for atheism, a backlash of the Catholic and Christian rallies that have been held to champion our religious liberty over the past couple of months. But at this "Rally for Reason" there was a comedian there, an atheist. His name is Eddie Izzard. I had never heard of him, but I guess he's famous. During the Rally he spoke, mockingly shouting into the sky, "God if you're there, we're here in Washington, come down now." "If you're there, this is a pretty good time to show up. I'm sure folks here would love it." Then he turned to the crowd with a laugh and said "He never comes down."

It's hard to even listen to this blasphemy but can we not hear in these words the echo of the Passion Narrative that we heard on Palm Sunday? The crowd shouting to Pilate "Crucify Him," the soldiers mockingly kneeling before Him, shouting "Hail, King of the Jews," those who watched the crucifixion shouting to Jesus on the cross "Save yourself by coming down from the cross" and "Come down from that cross that we might see and believe." In arrogance and pride, the crowd then and even today mock God, expect God to be some sort of circus actor performing at their command, expect God to prove Himself.

And how does God respond today to this human mockery and blasphemy? He does not turn away from us as we deserve, but humbly, silently, unceasingly God does come down to us, every day, on every altar, in every Catholic Church, all over the world. God comes down to us in the Holy Eucharist, this precious gift of His continual presence. The eyes of the proud and disbelieving cannot see it, for their blindness comes from their hatred of God and their rebellion. God's presence in the Holy Eucharist is seen and known by the humble, the docile, the ones willing to give themselves to God, the ones who love Him.

Faith in God and love of God produces sight, spiritual sight to see God's presence among us, most especially in the Holy Eucharist, given to us on this Holy Thursday night. As we cultivate our love and devotion to God, our spiritual sight grows and becomes keener and we are given the blessing of seeing God's presence in the Holy Eucharist with ever-greater spiritual vision.

Now, I don't want to be too much of a nay-sayer or a doom predictor, but I think that we are moving into a time of even greater persecution for our faith, even greater mockery of the truths of our faith and of God. And it occurred to me on Tuesday night at the Chrism Mass as Bishop Rhoades was preaching, that as this persecution continues to grow around us, we must anchor ourselves even more fully to the Bishop. He is the pillar of truth and strength that God has given us, for us to anchor to in the midst of the onslaught of the world.

This is the other great gift that we celebrate tonight, Holy Thursday, the priesthood. Even more correct to say that the Apostles, ordained this night, were the first Bishops of the Church, given the fullness of the priesthood to guard Christ's flock, to remain steady pillars of God's truth. From the bishop, from the priests that he ordains comes the Holy Eucharist. "Do this," Jesus says to the Apostles, "in memory of me."

Maybe the thought of persecution frightens us. It frightens me a bit. But to the humble who see the face of Almighty God hidden in the Holy Eucharist, God made present to us every day, who anchor themselves to the Bishop as to a pillar of truth, Jesus would say the same thing to us as He said to His disciples: “Do not be afraid... little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.”

We are the little flock of God, persecuted, as St. Paul says, but never abandoned, serving each other in love and even serving those who would mock us, praying for them, hoping for their salvation, because Jesus is our model of love and service who washed the feet of His disciples, even the feet of Judas, who He knew would betray Him. We cling to the Lord Jesus, who comes to us in the person of the Bishop and most especially in the Holy Eucharist, and who even through trial and difficulty leads us to the kingdom: “Do not be afraid, little flock.”

Given by Father Mark Gurtner at Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on Holy Thursday, 2012.