

Homily based on the readings from May 24, 2025 (Acts 16.1-10; John 15.18-21)

It is fair to say that the Catholic Church is experiencing a bit of a honeymoon right now with respect to the secular media. Reporters and commentators who usually have no interest at all in religion have been *fascinated* by the election of a new pope: the solemn procession of the cardinals into the Sistine Chapel, the plumes of white smoke billowing from the chimney, the dramatic announcement from the loggia. At least for the moment, they are ecstatic about the selection of an American pontiff – someone who speaks English with our own accent, who watches baseball and football, who attended Villanova University. I even heard one commentator point out that Leo XIV is almost certainly the first pope in human history who knows the theme song to *Gilligan's Island*!

Like all honeymoons, of course, this one is bound to come to an end.

We have already started seeing headlines like this one: “New Pope

Faces Scrutiny on LGBTQ+ Rights.” Sooner or later, people outside the Church will realize – to their horror – that the pope is actually Catholic. The reporting will shift – rather quickly, I think – from upbeat stories about his humble origins in the south side of Chicago to editorials denouncing his betrayal of whatever progressive causes the commentariat currently views as sacrosanct.

This situation, while deeply frustrating, illustrates an essential point that none of us must ever forget. To be blunt, secular society *despises* Christianity – it always has and it always will. Sometimes we may experience brief moments of reprieve – like the election of our first Catholic president or our first American pope – but, in the end, we always return to the fundamental paradigm, which has existed since the earliest days of the Church. Nero and Diocletian were not exceptions, but the rule. Francis Cardinal George, the former Archbishop of Chicago, once made the following statement: “I expect to die in my bed, my successor will die in prison and his successor will die a martyr in the public square.”

Even though this message may sound somewhat harsh, it is the *entire* point of today's Gospel reading:

If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first.

If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own;

but because you do not belong to the world,

and I have chosen you out of the world,

the world hates you.

At first glance, this observation may seem demoralizing or even terrifying – but, in fact, it is exceptionally *liberating*. There is *nothing* we can do that will *ever* make the world love us – absolutely nothing. They may ignore us, they may flatter us, they may occasionally offer us glimmers of admiration, but – when it actually matters – they *hate* us because they hate Jesus Christ. In the face of that hatred, *our* job is simply to hold fast to our beliefs and to respond to that hatred with love.

None of this is to say that we should refrain from engaging with the world around us. There is an anonymous epistle from the second

century, that I have really come to love, which beautifully describes the place of Christians within the world:

Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language, or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life. ... And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under all the disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country. ... They pass their days upon earth, but they are citizens of heaven.

As an American citizen, I am *profoundly* grateful to the men and women who gave their lives to make our country what it is, and am absolutely *delighted* that the Holy Father hails from our shores. On the other hand, our *deepest* loyalty belongs to our *heavenly* homeland. *That* is the Good

News that we must joyfully proclaim, to everyone who is willing to listen.