

If You Acknowledge Me on Earth, I Will Acknowledge You in Heaven

The evidence had been heard and the judge had sent the jury to the Jury Room with the instruction that, if they had any reasonable doubt as to the guilt of the accused, they were to return a verdict of 'Not Guilty'. The verdict had to be unanimous. An 18 year-old boy from the inner city was accused of stabbing his father to death. He had been heard fighting with his father on occasion and had even threatened to kill him. The evidence appeared to be overwhelming.

The jury of twelve men entered the Jury Room which was very hot due to a heat wave. Most of the jury members were convinced of the boy's guilt and were in a hurry to deliver the verdict and go home. It was decided to hold a vote immediately. The vote was: eleven Guilty and one Not Guilty. Eleven men thought it was an open-and-shut case but one thought that there might be a reasonable doubt and wanted to discuss the evidence; especially since a Guilty verdict would mean death to the youth.

They went over the evidence again and the one juror slowly began to convince the others that the evidence was not so clear in implicating the accused. He held out that there was still a reasonable doubt so they should deliver a verdict of Not Guilty. Over the course of several uncomfortable hours in the stifling Jury Room, he cast doubts on the evidence and slowly won all the other jurors over to his side so that, in the end, they rendered a unanimous Not Guilty verdict. But during the course of the deliberation, the lone juror was the subject of anger and ridicule by the other jurors who wanted a speedy decision. At one point, one juror even threatened to kill him!

The case is not real. It came from a movie called: Twelve Angry Men. It describes a situation where one person stands alone against the majority and suffers for it.

In the First Reading for this Sunday, the prophet Jeremiah knows what it feels like to stand alone. He has fulfilled his calling as a prophet and brought God's words of warning to the Israelites. The warnings were not well-received and Jeremiah says: 'All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. 'Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him'' (Jer. 20: 10) Even Jeremiah's close friends wanted to see him fail. They were plotting against him.

The life of a person who speaks the truth is not easy. The truth can anger people and make them want to take the person down.

Jesus knew the price of standing alone because people were plotting against Him as well. He told His disciples to hear His words and proclaim them from

the rooftops. But He cautioned them that they would have to pay a price for speaking the truth.

However, he encouraged them that, even if they died speaking the truth, they should not fear 'those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell' (Matt. 10: 28). Jesus also told them that not one sparrow 'will fall to the ground apart from your Father' (Matt. 10: 29). So they should not fear the persecution of people in this world but walk the righteous path according to the commandments of God.

The righteous ones have to be prepared to stand alone and suffer in this world. But Jesus tells us that, in proclaiming and living the Word of God, we will never be alone; that He will be with us. Jesus gives us the confidence to step out boldly when He says: 'Everyone, therefore, who acknowledges Me before humans, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven' (Matt. 10: 32).