

Dear Friends,

This past Tuesday we read in the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles 16:22-24. It tells the story of St. Paul and his companion, Silas, who were thrown into a prison in Philippi for proclaiming the Gospel. During the night, as Paul and Silas were chained by their hands and feet to a stake driven into the stone floor, they sang hymns of praise to God while all the other prisoners listened. As they were singing, an earthquake struck causing all the prison doors to open and all the chains to loosen. The jailer, who assumed all the prisoners had escaped, drew his sword to kill himself when Paul stopped him and said that all the prisoners were still in the jail. That night, the jailer asked how he could be baptized; St. Paul said that he would have to believe in Jesus Christ. The jailer took Paul and Silas into his home and dressed their wounds and cared for them. Paul proclaimed the gospel and the jailer and his family were baptized that same night.

I always marvel about the fact that Paul and Silas, as well as the other prisoners, remained in the prison. No one left, even though they were free to do so. What made them stay? Somehow Paul and Silas realized that remaining in the prison seemed like the responsible thing to do. Clearly, Paul and Silas used this opportunity to evangelize the jailer. Paul and Silas could have walked away. If they had, they would never have known the jailer and he probably would have died, if not by his own hand, then as a punishment from his superiors. Perhaps he and his family would never have been baptized.

If Paul and Silas had walked away from that prison, they would have been free. However, such an act would have been an abandonment of their mission to proclaim the gospel in every corner of the world, even a prison. As they sang their hymns in the night they must have been comforted, maybe the other prisoners were too. Their hymns were prayers. But their singing was also a form of evangelization. Even after that earthquake, they needed to stay where they were because their mission was not yet complete.

What is it that keeps us in the Church today? Why, when so many people walk away, do we remain steadfast in our commitment to the Church? I have a theory. I believe that we stay in the Church because deep inside we know that our mission is not yet complete. We have something we have to offer. Being in the Church is a responsibility that we take seriously. We are stewards of this dwelling place God has given us, and we

know that the Church's mission demands the best we can offer, and we can't turn our backs on that mission.

A big part of our mission as stewards of God's Church is still evangelization. We are called to proclaim the Gospel in the ways that we worship, through the singing of hymns, in our prayer lives, and in the ways we communicate our faith to our children.

It is important for us to wonder why we remain standing in the Church in a time when so many other people walk away. As we ask ourselves why we stay perhaps it becomes more evident that our mission as evangelizers in the world is one we have to take seriously. As Paul and Silas sang through the night, shackled by chains to a stake in the floor, they proclaimed the Gospel in the Church – not a building made of stone, but a church made of flesh and blood, a church that suffered in persecution, a church alive in the love of Christ.

This is the Church we live in today, and we still sing out our love – even though we don't have to – because that is our mission, and we are responsible to make sure we carry it out.

In joyful hope,

Fr. Tim Seigel