

## Daily Reflection by Sarah Adams

Today's readings: Luke 21:12-19; Psalm 98 and Revelation 15:1-4.

Let us pause for a minute to consider how great the God is whom we worship.

### Psalm 98: 1-4

Sing to the LORD a new song,  
for he has done marvelous things;  
his right hand and his holy arm  
have worked salvation for him.

<sup>2</sup>The LORD has made his salvation known  
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

<sup>3</sup>He has remembered his love  
and his faithfulness to Israel;  
all the ends of the earth have seen  
the salvation of our God.

### Luke 21:12-19

70 million Christians, it is estimated have been killed for their profession of faith in all of church history. This number is staggering, but what is even more frightening is that two-thirds of that number occurred after the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and since 1990 an average of 160 thousand Christians have been killed **every year**. In addition, untold numbers have been rejected by their families, arrested, beaten, lost everything they have all on account of their loyalty to Christ. ("The New Persecuted" by Antonio Socci)

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus is preparing his followers to expect persecution in all forms from all quarters. He wants to ensure that his disciples are under no illusion of the cost of following him and proclaiming the truth.

At St John's we have been praying for the persecuted church around the world for many years. Amongst our congregation, some have worked hard to encourage us to support the persecuted through prayer, financial aid or even going out to other countries to help.

Now our world is changing fast, we are witnessing a tidal wave of anti-Christian propaganda building from so many quarters. Basic Christian beliefs, such as the sanctity of life, marriage and gender are no longer just ridiculed, but are now considered "homophobic and intolerant views". Scotland are introducing a "hate speech bill" which they intend to cover conversations you would have in your own home. We are no longer really free to talk about what the Bible says, especially on social media platforms.

So this passage today is now very relevant to us. Jesus tells us not to worry. By his Holy Spirit, he will give us the right words to say.

As I considered these words, I wondered if really I were worried about the right words. If I am honest, other fears crowd my mind: would I be imprisoned, would I lose everything, would I lose my faith? These are real fears, but underneath all of these is one big question that I have to answer. Perhaps it would be the same for you.

“Is Jesus worth it? Is Jesus worthy of me taking a stand?”

We know the right answer. The textbook answer is of course he is. But there is a difference between knowing the right answer and actually believing it. When we have decided that not only do we believe that Jesus is the one who died for our sins, but that we will indeed put our trust in him and rely totally on him for guidance, whatever the outcome, then we will be able to stand and not fear the oncoming persecution. Joshua puts it very well: “*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*” (Joshua 24:15). Fears will always assail us, if we indulge them, they take a grip, rather like a pernicious weed. Instead, the Bible tells us not to worry. Easier said than done, you may say. But we have two tools which will wipe out any fear – reading God’s word and praying. Using both of these will enable us to focus on Jesus rather than our fears. Jesus uses a very interesting phrase “Make up your mind beforehand not to worry...” By choosing this option, we are now free to listen for God’s direction, we can focus on showing love to those who are mired in their own fears and angers.

As part of God’s church we will experience persecution, because this is the way God spreads his Good News and proclaims his victory over evil. But by standing firm in the faith that He has given us, we too will see His victory come to fruition.

**Let us pray:** Father God, thank you that you have promised to fill us again and again with your Holy Spirit so that we can stand firm in our faith during times of trial and persecution. Thank you that whatever may come, you will keep us safe in you, so that we can share in your glory. Thank you for the many opportunities we have to share our faith with others. May we with faith proclaim that Jesus is truly worthy of our worship, honour and sacrifice. Amen.