

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

A Sobering Reflection Thirty-fourth Week in Ordinary Time Wednesday,
November 23, 2016 8:15 AM Rev 15:1-4; **Lk 21:12-19** (St. Clement I, pope and
martyr) (We will be persecuted in our mission to witness to the living Spirit of God who
speaks through us.)

There are a lot of courses in modern colleges and universities called “Comparative Religions.” Unfortunately these courses usually talk about how certain attributes or qualities are similar in all religions. **What is more interesting to me is** what is different and specifically **what is unique to the teachings of Christ.** I do not believe that any religion will have a text like this, **prophesying that followers will be persecuted** both for religious and political reasons: before synagogues and kings and governors. **This is not a way to get people to follow you,** to tell people that they are going to suffer, but Jesus is quite forthright about this.

But then **what Jesus is doing is something utterly unique.** Religion may be a basic human trait, but it tends to become identified with certain cultures or tribes. Jesus’ teachings, although you could call them religious, are **not in any way identifiable with a tribe or a culture.** It is something that goes way beyond it, **not only goes beyond it but goes against it.** And that’s where the persecution comes from: various forms of tribalism, nationalism; people identifying themselves with a particular group find Christianity in its true sense a threat. And this is what it’s about. **“You will be hated by all because of my name,” because you will be a threat.** The truth is a threat to people who don’t want it, and they are many—and they are many.

So this is a sobering reflection as we move toward the end of the Church’s year. We begin Advent on Sunday. **This is a sober reflection on the role we have been called on to play in the world.** The mission is to witness, **to witness to the living Spirit of God,** the living Spirit of truth. It is not a matter of doctrine that we can learn. It’s a matter of being living witnesses to the Spirit **who speaks through us,** a Spirit that no one can “resist or refute,” by Jesus’ own promise. And **that is what authentic Christian life is,** whether you call it religious or not. And anything that is not quite up to this, is not quite what Jesus was talking about.