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Bless Our Persecutors Sixth Week of Easter Monday, May 27, 2019 Acts 16:11-15;
Jn 15:26—16:4a (St. Augustine of Canterbury, bishop) (Those of us who have been given
a share in the mission of Christ, need to brace ourselves for a rocky road.)

“I have told you this so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you.”

“To be forewarned is to be forearmed.” So Jesus wants us to live with a sense, not of foreboding—not of foreboding—but **a sense that there will be troubles in life.** He is not offering us the proverbial “bowl of cherries”; this is not his message at all. It’s a message of astonishing joy and goodness, but it is mixed with a realism that between now and the ultimate coming together of all things when “God is all in all” there is a great deal of processing necessary, and that processing involves suffering. **It involves suffering and it involves actually persecution.**

But interesting enough, **the persecution is not actually ill will itself.** **“The hour is coming when everyone who kills you”—**that’s pretty drastic—**“will think he is offering worship to God.”** So it’s actually **misguided devotion.** Can we really see that in our world today? Terrorism is actually misguided devotion. **Terrorists really believe they are worshipping God—**they really do; that’s their faith, but it’s utterly misguided. **But it should elicit from us a certain sort of deep pity.**

There are various ways in which people can find God, but none of these ways is completely valid, so that’s why God has come to us in Christ. But for whatever reason, supine ignorance, which cannot be overcome, various forms of adversity, terrible habits of mind or spirit, for whatever reason, that Christ isn’t revealed to someone as the image of God, as the model given to us to follow, if for whatever reason people can’t see that, then they are in a terrible state, and they really need our prayers, as well as all the patience, goodness, and all the generosity we can muster, which of course are all fruits of the Spirit, gifts in an emotional sense, participations in the light of God, the love of God, different colors of the rainbow that has as its source the light of the

Holy Spirit itself. **So we need to be concerned about our persecutors.** That's why Jesus says, **"Bless your persecutors,"** as he did on the cross: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." We are in a state of mass ignorance on this planet. Those of us who have been given a share in the knowledge of God, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, **those of us who have been given a share in the mission of Christ, need to brace ourselves for a rocky road,** bringing God's love and goodness into a world that is locked in ignorance and darkness, which often reinforces that ignorance and darkness with its own very strong will.

Nonetheless, the gospel is **the good news.** It is given to us as a gift. **We now need to let it flourish within ourselves and carry it to others. And this is God's road to peace.** Along the way we will suffer, but we will eventually arrive at the destiny that God has appointed, and we will reign with God eternally.