

Statement for Website
From Fr. Michael Basque

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When I was in high school, I wanted to fit in with the other students. After all, most young people have a fragile sense of themselves and desire acceptance by their peers. Yet, there were times when I realized the price of “fitting in” was just too high. Someone would decide to do something which was unwise and often dangerous and everyone else would go along with it. The fear of being considered “uncool” acted as a strong force upon many of my peers. Although it made me feel awkward, not following the crowd often turned out to be the right decision.

In today’s First Reading, a crowd of people are “stirred up” by some Jewish leaders to turn against the Deacon Stephen. These leaders are annoyed because their efforts to undermine Stephen’s message about Jesus have failed. In the Gospel, Jesus is confronted by a crowd of people who witnessed his feeding of five thousand individuals with a few loaves and fishes. This group who had earlier tried to make Christ king, expected him to continue providing them with material benefits. In both cases, it is unlikely every person in the crowd made a conscious choice to act as they did. However, as experience teaches, sometimes a group of people is transformed by skillful leaders into a mob which takes on a mind of its own. It takes enormous courage for someone to stand up against such a group. It also takes bravery to resist the temptation to become part of that group. Each of us is an individual. We are endowed with the ability to think and the freedom to act.. This means we are morally responsible for our actions. The fact others were doing something wrong does not justify our participation in such an action.

During this Covid-19 crisis, there are signs the sense of solidarity among people which existed a few weeks ago is starting to unravel. There are conflicts between people who argue the need to protect the health of the public is paramount and those who contend they need to get back to work so they can pay their bills. Each group has legitimate concerns. Skillful leaders who want to pursue their own interests know how to turn such situations to their advantage. When people are confused by events they can neither control nor understand and are fearful of the future they can easily become a mob. Catholics and other people of faith understand they will have to account for their actions one day. Their trust in God can help them deal with the confusion and fear they experience. Their faith can also help them put today’s events into a longer perspective. This will hopefully enable them to think clearly and decide carefully about the developments taking place around them. It should help them resist the temptation to join a mob. Perhaps, their example might help others do the same.

A mob is not always a group of bad people. Often they are made up of individuals who have just stopped thinking for themselves. Today’s readings reveal such a group can often be badly mistaken in what it thinks is right. By his death on the cross, Jesus indicated the cost of not “fitting in” can be high; but it is worth it.