

'If the world hates you, remember that it hated me before you.'

These are strong and sobering words. If the apostles ever thought that they would be loved by all and their missionary endeavours always appreciated, well that was the moment when Jesus brought them down to earth.

The truth is that a person who is faithful to Jesus will sometimes be misunderstood, rejected and even hated because 'they do not belong to the world.' Their beliefs, values, choices, will often be at odds with the mainstream culture.

For challenging the well-established norms of the Jewish society, Jesus paid the ultimate price. Martin Luther King suffered the same fate for speaking out against segregation and racism in the States. Mother Teresa was hated too, because she dared to look after people from the lowest caste in Calcutta. John Paul II was despised for effectively challenging the communist system and for defending without compromise the sanctity of human life from conception till natural death.

That makes me think of the words St Paul wrote to Timothy in prison: 'For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of strength, love and good judgment' (2 Tim 1:7).

When I was a student, an old and experienced priest said to me regarding my future preaching: 'Remember, if everyone loves your homilies, you haven't started preaching yet.' And then, he pointed his finger at a crucifix. I think there is much truth in what he said.

At the age of thirteen, my cousin would regularly wag school until one day her mum received a phone call from the principal. On the following day, the teacher asked her to check out the many sick notes received by the school. My auntie looked at them and quickly realized that her daughter had forged her signature. What do you think she did? Did she tell a few sweet little lies to cover up for her naughty child? No way.

Right there and then, in front of her daughter, my auntie said to the teacher: 'I'm terribly sorry but I did not write and sign these sick notes.' Back then, my cousin hated her mum for her uncompromising attitude and did not talk to her for a month. Today, they are best friends.

Do we have the courage to stand up for what we believe? Are we prepared to rock the boat when necessary? Are we ready to face the consequences? As Jesus said, 'If the world hates you, remember that it hated me before you.'