

The Gospel According to “Firefly” (Fr. Lawrence R. Farley)

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The Firefly ship Serenity

For a preacher who loves to mine contemporary culture (that ephemeral thing) for theological nuggets, the late TV series “Firefly” represents a rare gift. Each of the all-too-brief fifteen episodes and the movie “Serenity” based upon it offer a number of lines in which the perceptive theologian can find Christian truth. (You just need to have your ears wide open, and your brown coat on.) Here I would like to recall two of them, both of them much needed Firefly insights for believers who strive to remain faithful to Jesus Christ in the midst of an increasingly secular world.

The first comes from a conversation (make that “interrogation”), in which Malcolm Reynolds, the captain of the ship “Firefly”, is asked by an Alliance Commander (i.e. The Bad Guy) about the name of his ship. Prior to buying and captaining the Firefly ship, Mal had fought the Alliance on the side of the rebels. The Alliance was victorious, and it crushed the rebels (whose uniform consisted of

brown coats), with the decisive battle occurring in Serenity Valley. Mal named his ship "Serenity" after that battle, arousing the suspicion of the interrogating Alliance Commander. "Seems odd you'd name your ship after a battle you were on the wrong side of", he opined. Mal's reply: "May have been the losing side. Still not convinced it was the wrong one."

In this reply of quiet defiance, we hear the voice of the martyrs. Whether it be in the early centuries of the pagan Roman Empire, or in the twentieth century of Communist Russia, or in Islamic lands ruled by a ruthless sharia law, Christians have routinely found themselves in battles the world thought they were on the wrong side of. For the world, be it pagan, Communist, Islamic, or militantly secular, what matters is who wins. Wealth, popularity, and even survival depend upon being on the winning side, and the world has always thought the Christians were fools for fighting what everyone knew would be a losing battle. The world's cry is ever, "Who is like the Beast, and who is able to wage war with it?" (Rev. 13:4) Mal and the martyrs know differently. In this age, we may be on the losing side. We are not convinced it is the wrong one. And when the Lord Jesus returns in glory, the true winners and losers will at last be revealed. In the meanwhile, "Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints" (Rev. 13:10).

The second Firefly theological nugget comes at the end of the movie "Serenity", when Mal referred to his ship. In the midst of a hostile world, still ruled by the Alliance, this ship was not just a ship. It was home to Mal and the crew which had become his second family; it was their freedom, their hope for physical survival, and for their spiritual survival—the only way they could hold out with integrity against the all-but-invincible and universal Alliance. Mal tells his new pilot that she has to love the ship. Loving the ship is matter of life and death. As Mal said, "Love keeps her in the air when she oughtta fall down".

We Christians are also surrounded by an all-but-invincible and universal power—the World, which opposes us and would seduce our hearts away from God. The Scriptures are quite clear: "The whole world lies in the power of the Evil One" (1 Jn. 5:19). We survive because we live in a ship—the Church of God, adrift upon the sea of the world, floating through the black. The Church is not just an organization. It is our home, our freedom, our hope for spiritual survival. And if we are to survive, we must love the Church, cling to her, defend her, serve our fellow crew, the brothers and sisters within her, and never leave her. Love like this does the impossible, and helps us survive in this hostile world. As St. Paul said, love never fails (1 Cor. 13:8). Love keeps us in the air when we oughtta fall down.

By Fr. Lawrence Farley

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