

Government Tries to Crucify 'Philly Jesus' for Spreading Message of Hope

A lawyer for the Philadelphia man whom residents have come to know as "Philly Jesus" said the bogus arrest of his client on Friday was reminiscent of the persecution suffered by the real Jesus some 2,000 years ago.

Attorney Charles M. Gibbs said his client, whose real name is Michael Grant, is guilty of nothing more than spreading a message of peace and hope. News accounts were not clear whether Grant was evangelizing in the Center City area of Philadelphia.

Grant's usual haunt is a place called LOVE Park. On Friday, Grant, who picked up the moniker "Philly Jesus" in part because of his long hair, beard, robes and staff, was arrested shortly after taking a few laps around the new Dilworth Park skating rink.

He was charged with disorderly conduct and failure to disperse.

"Those are charges that, in my experience, the government uses when you don't do whatever the government wants you to do, or that the police officer wants you to do," Gibbs, the lawyer Grant retained on Saturday to represent him, told the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Grant tweeted after the arrest that the officer had accused him of solicitation. Gibbs said Grant had been talking to people and taking photographs with them, as he has done for months in the LOVE Park area, the newspaper reported. Grant accepts tips, he wrote on Twitter, but does not actively seek money.

The officer told Grant to leave the area, but Grant did not, Gibbs said, because it was “an unlawful order to leave a public park,” Gibbs told reporters. Then came Grant’s arrest.

“He’s a very decent young man who is simply exercising his First Amendment right of speech,” Gibbs said Saturday.

Attorney Gibbs said that Grant thinks the officer recognized him from the time, more than a year ago, when he was homeless, addicted to drugs and would panhandle in Suburban Station.

Court records show that Grant has been arrested more than a dozen times on charges including loitering, possession of marijuana and theft of services.

“He believes that the officer remembers him from those days,” Gibbs was quoted by the *Inquirer* as saying, adding that Grant has been sober and drug-free for a year.

Grant has been retweeting dozens of supportive messages from his flock of Twitter followers.

His lawyer said Grant was looking forward to his day in court. In the meantime, he said, Grant will continue to spread his message.

“To have our local government try and crucify a guy who’s standing in LOVE Park and spreading a message of hope and peace is reminiscent of what happened 2,000 years ago—and still patently disturbing,” he told the news media.