

12th Sunday C, OLPH, Blessing of Doors, Adoration Chapel, and Altar

I. Introduction: “Who Do You Say That I Am?”

A. Years ago, as a seminarian at Mount Saint Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, I took a final examination in a course called “Christology”, a course that dealt with the identity and saving mission of Jesus. Among other things, we were questioned about the precise meaning of the various names for Jesus found in the New Testament, titles such as “Messiah”, “the Christ,” “Son of God” and “Son of Man”, to name a few. It will go unrecorded in this homily how well or poorly I did on that exam but suffice it to say that merely giving the correct answers on an exam does not make one a disciple - that takes much more than getting the answer right.

B. I was reminded of that Christology exam while reflecting on the Gospel reading from St. Luke just proclaimed. As it opens, we find Jesus absorbed in prayer before his heavenly Father in preparation for what would be a turning-point in his relationship with his disciples, that point where they would begin to come to terms with who Jesus really was. In this critical moment, Jesus decides to give the disciples a quiz of his own: “Who do the crowds say that I am?” he asks, and the disciples relate to Jesus the most common opinions. People thought Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. Jesus then proceeds to put the disciples on the spot by asking, in effect, “Well, what about you? Who do you say that I am?” Enlightened by God the Father, Peter spoke up and answered for the others: “[You are] the Christ of God,” that is to say, God’s anointed, the long-awaited Messiah.

II. Taking Up Our Cross

A. Peter answered correctly but did not fully understand his own answer, for he still thought of the Messiah as one who would free Israel from the Romans. That is why today's Gospel tells us that Jesus "rebuked" Peter and the others, for in spite of all they had seen and heard, they did not yet understand. In reality, Peter would understand the meaning of Jesus' Messiahship only after he witnessed the Lord's suffering and death on the Cross, and only after Peter himself suffered for the sake of the Gospel, even to the point of laying down his own life. What Peter had yet to learn was in fact predicted, centuries before, in the prophecy of Zephaniah (found in our first reading): "They shall look on him whom they have pierced ..." and ... "they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only son."

B. And the same is true for us. We will understand and accept Jesus as our Messiah and follow in his footsteps only to the extent that we are willing to share in his sufferings: "If anyone wishes to come after me," Jesus says, "he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me." These are words we have heard often and have committed to memory. In fact, however, it is a difficult thing to "deny" oneself, a difficult thing not to love life, not to try to hang on to it, or to use the language of Pope Francis, to go beyond our "comfort zone". We may correctly understand who Jesus is and what he did to save us but it will not register in our minds and hearts nor will it mean anything in daily life unless and until we share in what Jesus suffered for the redemption of the world.

C. So, what really does it mean to "deny" oneself? Does it mean that we put on a long face? Or feign humility by denying the gifts that God has given us? Does denying ourselves mean that we engage in destructive forms of self-loathing? In truth, denying oneself means nothing of the sort. Rather, it means we actually believe what St. Paul teaches us today in Galatians: "Through faith, [we] are

children of God in Christ Jesus.” Faith is like the new church doors we have blessed here today at Our Lady of Perpetual Help: it opens us out onto a heavenly world of supreme trust and unimaginable love. Paul tells us that over and above any and every human distinction, we are loved with a wondrously generous love by God the Father, that we are held by God with a love at once strong and tender. And that love, poured in our hearts by the Holy Spirit engenders in you and me the trust and strength we need to pick up our cross and to follow the Christ of God.

D. It really does take that kind of trust to believe we will gain our lives by losing them. It takes a lot of trust and a lot of love to face the confrontation Jesus wants to provoke in the hearts of each one of us between our love of life and our fear of dying on the one hand and his invitation for us to sacrifice our lives as he sacrificed his own on the other. What we need to understand is that the Gospel does not skim the surface of life but rather “reaches into the center of human life, to the love of self that is natural to all of us” (Servais Pinckaers, *The Spirituality of Martyrdom*, p. 118).

III. Adoration Chapel

A. In light of this, we can understand and appreciate all more deeply the centrality of the Sunday Eucharist in our lives. For in the Eucharist we enter into Jesus’ own sacrifice of love on the Cross, his gift of self to the Father and to us, for the forgiveness of our sins. Not only do we share in the graces that Christ won for us on the Cross but we receive the Lord himself, his Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. Thus the Eucharist is endlessly renewable point of contact between ourselves and the Crucified Savior, the venue where we are renewed as sons and daughters of God. Here is the source of trust and strength we need to bear our burdens, whether it is a faltering marriage, difficulties in raising children, financial problems, illness, troubles at work ... each of us can fill in the blanks. In the Eucharist Christ draws us

to himself and reminds us that we are God's children, and nourishes us with his own life so that we will not only bear our cross but do so with overflowing charity for those around us, especially the poor.

B. Yet, in constructing a beautiful new adoration chapel, you rightly perceive that something even more than Sunday Eucharist is necessary. If we would be sons and daughters after the mind and heart of Christ, we need to do what he did - we need to be absorbed in prayer as often as possible. We need to kneel before the Blessed Sacrament to deepen our faith, to make our faith come alive, in the true presence of Jesus in our midst. As we adore the Lord, really, truly, and substantially present in the Blessed Sacrament, we begin to absorb the stupendous truth that God's Son became one us, and that sharing our humanity, he laid down his life in love for us. We allow the heart of him who was pierced to speak to our hearts, to inflame them with love and trust as we face turning points in our own lives, and as we adore the Lord we experience a foretaste of the joy of heaven when we will be gathered around God's Throne, with all the saints and angels, all lost in wonder as we behold God face to face. So it is that we will bless the adoration chapel and its altar where the Blessed Sacrament will be exposed and daily Mass will be celebrated.

IV. Conclusion

A. It is Mary who attends us whenever we offer Mass or kneel and adoration for it is her mission to lead us to Jesus, the Christ of God. Through the loving intercession of Mary, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, may we experience as never before the joy of opening our hearts to Jesus our Savior and find the courage to deny ourselves, to pick up our cross each day, and follow in his footsteps!

B. May God bless us and keep us always in his love!