

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time; St. Joseph Monastery

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St. Joseph Monastery

Oct. 21, 2018

First, let me say that I am delighted to return to St. Joseph Monastery for the celebration of Sunday Mass. It is always a joy to offer Mass in a parish when it's not a special occasion - not Confirmation or an anniversary - "I just happened to be in the neighborhood." Thank you for welcoming me so warmly and thank you for all you are doing under the leadership of your Pastor, Fr. Michael Murphy.

I don't usually read letters pastors send me in the pulpit but I must say that Fr. Murphy's recent letter to me caught my attention. He spoke of the works of evangelization, of spreading the Gospel, that are going on in the parish, with your wholehearted participation. He spoke also of your generosity as a parish family - the increase in offertory and the making of much-needed repairs. Your readiness to step up to meet the needs of the parish is truly gratifying and with Fr. Murphy I truly do thank you. But I think this is a wonderful moment for us to thank Fr. Murphy for his wonderful and dedicated leadership of your very special parish!

There is another matter . . . there always is! . . . and that's the Rectory roof. I understand that it's so leaky that Fr. Murphy goes to bed in a wet suit. So he wrote me and asked me if he could get on with getting this fixed and, of course, there's only one right answer and that's "yes"! So, just as I don't usually refer to business letters from pastors in the pulpit, so too I don't usually answer them in the pulpit - but this is an exception!

An Exceptional Parish

And indeed, St. Joseph's Monastery is an exceptional parish. I know it is a great

challenge to maintain this church but I know also that you cherish it because of its beauty and its history. Of the church's beauty, I would say that is self-evident. Its beauty captivates both the eye and the soul the minute we walk in. Equally exceptional is the long history of this parish.

As it happens, my visit takes place a day after the feast of St. Paul of the Cross, and some of you will remember that he was founder of the Passionists. Although the founding religious community has departed, their spirit remains, especially the spirit of their holy founder. St. Paul of the Cross lived most of his life in the 18th century and while yet a young man he was inspired to found the Passionists, a religious order dedicated to a life of penance and to the preaching of the Cross. Through the years, this community of faith was formed in the spirit of the Passionists, in their attachment to Jesus who poured out his life to save us, in their zeal for the Gospel, in their prayer, and detachment from the things of this world.

The counsel which St. Paul of the Cross gave to his priests and brothers is also good advice for you and me in our desire to live in this world as the Lord's disciples: "Live in such a way," he wrote, "that all may know that you bear outwardly as well as inwardly the image of Christ crucified, the model of all gentleness and mercy."

Jesus, the Model of All Gentleness and Mercy

As it also happens, today's Scripture readings go together to paint for us in the Holy Spirit the living image of the Crucified Lord, he who is indeed "the model of all gentleness and mercy." They teach us who this Jesus is and what he was like, and hearing the inspired words of Scripture, we are drawn together in faith and hope and filled with love as we prepare to enter more deeply into the banquet of Christ's Sacrifice.

The image which our readings paint of Jesus is not that of a successful person, not at least according to the measures of worldly success. Jesus wielded no earthly power. He had no possessions. He left us no writings. Yet his personality - a combination of authority and humility - amazed people. Many in Israel wondered who he was and if he might possibly deliver them from the oppression of foreign captors, the latest of which was the Roman Empire. But Jesus was not to enjoy success either with the

crowds or the authorities. Indeed, it was hard enough to get his apostles to understand what he was all about!

No sooner than Jesus predicted in some detail his Passion and Death did James and John approach him, asking for his open-ended approval to their as yet-to-be-revealed request. Jesus, of course, did not fall for that tactic but instead asked them what they wanted. And what they wanted were positions of prominence in Jesus' government, in a kingdom they misunderstood as all too earthly, all too tied to the perks of human power. Jesus asks them if they can undergo the Baptism he was facing and drink the Cup he was about to drink. In other words, he asks them if they are willing to share in his Crucifixion - his immersion into the world of human suffering and sinfulness, the cup of suffering he was about to drain. Without understanding any of this, James and John eagerly answered "yes" and by that time the other apostles were thoroughly irritated with James and John.

Jesus then teaches them what they should be like - and in doing so - he teaches you and me what he is like so that we might model our lives on him. In a phrase, Jesus told his apostles and he tells us to be meek, mild, and patient - just as he, the Great High Priest, is able to sympathize with us in our weakness, just as he, God's Son made flesh, taught with unassuming authority, just as he, who is Savior and Lord, would lay down his life in suffering to ransom us from the folly of our sins, to enable me and you to approach the throne of God's mercy with confidence. How grateful we should be to Jesus, our gentle Savior, who gave himself completely to the Father for our sakes. This is the mystery into which we enter every time we celebrate the Eucharist. We partake of his Body broken for us and we drink the Cup of his suffering, so that we might become those men and women who expend ourselves in love for our families, our neighbors, the poor and the vulnerable - so that we might be in the world today witnesses of Jesus' redeeming Presence.

Concluding Reflections

Yes, as we enter into this church we are surrounded by beauty - but the deeper beauty that surrounds us is not a product of human artistry. Rather, it is the humble, loving deeds of mercy and goodness that surround us, deeds performed by countless parishioners through the years of its history, acts of service and love recorded in no

history books, recounted in no oral tradition, but known and cherished by the Lord, by the One who is the greatest of all because he is the Servant of all. In the end, the humility of our love and the authenticity of our service - in the end, this is what will bring us through the crisis that is gripping the Church because of harm done to innocents and harm covered up by church authority. Only a humility rooted in the truth and love of Jesus can make us trustworthy.

Only a humility rooted in the truth and love of Jesus can make us servants who are ready to do whatever is necessary to rebuild God's Household, his Church.

But if, perchance, we find ourselves feeling that the Lord has set the bar too high, if perchance we think it is too difficult to attain the degree of humility and service that Jesus models for us or to engage in the work of rebuilding the Church literally and figuratively, we have only to turn to St. Joseph, the Patron of your parish and the Patron of the Church Universal. St. Joseph was a good and just man, a manual laborer, a man open to God's will. His consent to the message of the angel's message, received in a dream, was pivotal to our salvation. St. Joseph who consented to our salvation will surely hear us when we ask his loving intercession for our needs and the needs of the Church, especially our need to think, act, and be like Jesus!

May God bless us and keep us in his love!