

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Investiture Mass, Order of the Holy Sepulchre

Investiture Mass

Middle-Atlantic Lieutenancy, Order of the Holy Sepulchre

Basilica of the Assumption

Oct. 27, 2018

Last night we remembered the beloved members of our Middle Atlantic Lieutenancy who entered eternity during the past year. We also celebrated the promotions conferred on fellow members of our Lieutenancy, rejoicing and giving thanks for their long & faithful service to the mission of the Order. And moments ago, our hearts were gladdened by the investiture of new members into our Order and our Lieutenancy. Let us express our warmest congratulations to our new confreres!

Investiture weekend is also a time to reflect on the twofold mission of the Order: its mission to preserve the places made holy by the life, death, and resurrection of the Savior... and its mission to sustain the Church and the works of the Church in the Holy Land, especially its works of education, social services, and pastoral care. Through our prayers, our generosity, and our pilgrimages to the Holy Land, we are able to touch many lives with compassionate love of Christ. So, on behalf of the Grand Master, His Eminence Cardinal Edwin O'Brien and our Lieutenant, Her Excellency, Valencia Camp, I truly thank all of you for your devotion to the Order of the Holy Sepulchre and its mission.

Where Would We Be Without Mary?

Today's Scripture readings remind us, however, that we would not be together, united in faith and mission, except for one person: the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Palestine. We see this so clearly in the Gospel account of the Annunciation just proclaimed, an event that took place in a humble village known as Nazareth. Although some regarded this poor village with disdain, it was, in fact, home to a

number of descendants of the House of David from which the promised Messiah, the Savior, was to come. Numbering perhaps 200 inhabitants, the place was alive with the promise of salvation which God made to Abraham and to his descendants.

Amongst those living in this little town was Mary, daughter of Joachim and Anne. Unbeknownst to Mary and to her relatives, she had been chosen by God to play a pivotal role in the divine plan for the redemption of the world. Already Mary was full of grace, preserved from all sin, & steeped in the Word of God. Already too she was betrothed to Joseph, a kindred spirit, open to the will of God. To this lowly handmaid appears the Angel Gabriel who addresses her as “blessed among women” and “full of grace”. Gabriel imparts the astonishing news that she is to be the Mother of the Messiah: the Son of God would take flesh in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit and be born into human history to redeem sinful humanity.

Bernard of Clairvaux tells us that the whole world held its breath waiting for Blessed Mary to answer – Adam, Abraham, David, the prophets—all awaited Mary’s answer (In Praise of the Virgin Mary, 4.8-9). At length, from her sinless heart, came the response for which they longed: “Be it done to me according to Thy Word!” St. John Paul II calls the moment of Mary’s consent to be the Mother of God “... the greatest event ever to take place in human history” (*Gift and Mystery*, p. 29). Yes, without Mary’s consent, we would not be here. Christ would not have come into the world and we would not have been saved. Nor would there be on earth any place so touched with the divine as is the Holy Land. Truly, ‘the Lord has done great things for us and holy is his Name’ (cf. Ps. 126:3; Lk. 1:49).

Mary, the Dwelling Place of God

In the radiance of God’s grace and glory, Mary opens our eyes more widely to the deepest significance of the places our Order seeks to protect and foster and to the good works and ministries we support. For the moment Mary conceived the Son of God in her virginal womb, Mary became Daughter Zion, the embodiment of the hopes and yearnings of Israel. Her sinless heart and her virginal womb became the interior space, the “Zion” wherein the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. In Mary was fulfilled the promise of a God who in a definitive way came to dwell among his people ‘to bring them knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins’

(Luke 1:77).

From the 'interior holy land' of Mary's sinless heart, Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, entered human history. Likewise, the places where Jesus lived and ministered became a holy land: where Jesus was born and grew up, where he preached and healed, where he suffered and died, where he rose and ascended into glory - all these places were matchlessly touched with glory, "the glory of God shining on the face of Christ". And because of Mary's consent, the God of glory & majesty has also drawn near *to us*, to the places where *we* live and work, worship and serve. Thanks to her, our God is no distant God, no mere abstraction, but the Incarnate Son, crucified and risen, who dwells among us, most especially in the Holy Eucharist, the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

Never do we gather for Eucharist without the presence of Mary. We see this quite clearly in today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles. St. Luke tells us that when the Apostles returned to Jerusalem they went to an upper room, perhaps the Cenacle where the Last Supper took place. There, we are told, the Apostles, some women, and Mary joined together in prayer. *And*, as St. John Paul II observed, Mary was surely present "at the Eucharistic celebrations of the first generation of Christians who were devoted to 'the breaking of bread'" (JP II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 53, AA 2:42). What's more, Our Lady is with us now, in our celebration of the Eucharist and in the radiance of her maternal love this venerable Basilica is aglow with the divine life of her Son and our Savior . . . thus a place of holiness and beauty.

Mary's Desire for Us

As Mary joins in our Eucharist, praying with us and for us, what is it that she most wants to see happen in our lives? What is the "content", so to speak, of her prayer for you and me before God's Throne? Is it not that we would give our consent, our "yes" to God such that our hearts would be the dwelling place for her Son, such that we would truly be temples of the Holy Spirit? Is not Mary longing to have her Son inhabit and travel freely across the interior space of our souls, transforming that space into 'a holy land' - a 'place' made holy by his redeeming Presence and by our love for those in need? Does not Mary long to hear us say with the Apostle St. Paul,

“It is not I who live but Christ Jesus who lives in me” (Gal. 3:20).

When Christ lives in us and irradiates his grace and glory through us, then the places where we travel, the things that we touch, the persons with whom we interact . . . encounter his love. We have it in our power to make even the most barren secular landscape a place of holiness – if only we are willing to unite ourselves to Christ through Mary – through Mary, the woman clothed with the sun, adorned with twelve stars, the woman through whom Satan was defeated.

If only we are willing, with the help of Mary’s prayers, to engage in the struggle against temptation and against sin in our Church and in our world – if only we cling to Mary, then those places in our hearts and in our culture, thought of as God-forsaken, will bloom with that newness of life and love that Mary brought to our world, for through Mary, ‘the Lord has indeed done great things for us and holy is his Name!’

Our Lady of Palestine, pray for us!