

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Archdiocesan Celebration of the World Day of Consecrated Life

Saturday, 3rd Week of Lent

Archdiocesan Celebration of the World Day of Consecrated Life

St. Agnes Parish, Catonsville

Mar. 30, 2019

Introduction

It seems unusual to hold a celebration of anything – let alone consecrated life – in the midst of this Lenten penitential season. To be fair, the World Day for Consecrated Life was officially celebrated on the Solemnity of the Annunciation, last Monday, a day of great joy in the life of the Church and indeed in the life and history of humanity. The Annunciation, moreover, goes to the very heart of consecrated life, an evangelical way of life that announces the Gospel just as the Angel Gabriel brought the Good News of Salvation to Mary.

The Annunciation filled us with the joy of the original proclamation of the Gospel, viz., the announcement that ‘God so loved the world that he sent us his only Son, so that any who believed in him would have eternal life’ (cf. John 3:16). In turn, our Lenten liturgy and today’s readings, in essence, confront us with the first utterance of the overall Gospel message: repent and believe. In the witness of your life and in your ministries you sum up both dimensions. Even as your evangelical style of life proclaims the joy of the Gospel, so too it also serves as a flesh-and-blood calling to everyone to undergo a genuine conversion of life and to embrace an avid life of faith. And if heaven rejoices over one repentant sinner, we too should rejoice that God has called you, as women and men in consecrated life, to accompany others along the path of repentance and faith that we ourselves humbly strive to tread.

A Style of Life and Service

As you know far better than I ever could, your way of life springs from the very heart of the Gospel. Amid the many forms that consecrated life takes, ... enriched as these forms are by a marvelous array of charisms, ... expressed as they are in a wondrous variety of ministries, you embody the Lord's own style of life - namely - ... a life of intense prayer; a life of community with his disciples; ... a life of poverty, having nowhere to lay his head; ... a life of chaste and singlehearted love extended to all whom he encountered; ... a life of obedience to the saving will of his Father - ... a life-giving obedience expressed in his teaching, his works of healing, and above all, in his Paschal Mystery, his Death and Resurrection.

For the Lord did not merely call others to repentance and faith. Though sinless, though innocent, he took upon himself our sins, and he did this not only in his suffering and death but indeed by his whole manner of life. Although he was always united with his Father in his divine nature, in his human nature, in his humanity, he demonstrated for us how to turn our gaze away from sin and the allurements of this world so as to glimpse the mercy, goodness, and glory of his Heavenly Father. We might even say there was nothing haphazard about Jesus' life and ministry. Every word, every deed, every choice was at the service of the mission given him by the Father in the Holy Spirit. No one of us, of course, can even approximate the holiness of Christ's humanity but in his mercy God permits folks like you and me to reflect even in our weakness aspects of that sacred humanity by which we have been saved. Whilst being redeemed ourselves, we are instruments of God's saving love. In his love we can indeed lead transfigured lives capable of amazing the world.

The Prophet Hosea

Even so, it may still sound just a bit too grim to say that our vocations are geared toward helping ourselves and others to repent, to convert, and to believe, especially in the context of today's celebration of fidelity and service. But the Prophet Hosea gives us another perspective, does he not? Hosea salutes from afar the Christ whom we follow and the Christ whom we strive to proclaim by our vocations and our lives the One who will raise us up to live in his presence, ... the One whose judgment shines forth like the light, ... the One whose coming will be like the spring rains that water the earth. To reiterate, a call to repentance and conversion is not a call to the dismal but rather an invitation to share the Lord's life, love, and glory now and in

the age to come.

And the news gets better. Even as the Lord makes us in our weakness “instruments of his peace”, so too he announces through us to any and all who are in any way open to it, that the new life of grace and the joy of the Gospel are not out of reach. It is readily available not only to us but to every person, for God wants everyone to know the truth and be saved (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). He asked only that we be open to his love and ready to bestow his love upon others. Thus it is that the Lord desires mercy and not sacrifice.

Our Responsorial Psalm, Psalm 51, is a cry from the heart in which we acknowledge our sins and offenses and seek that purity of heart which is at the core of our vocations to proclaim in the Spirit of Jesus that the Kingdom of God is at hand. This Psalm is also a companion-piece to the Gospel in which the Lord warns us against any form of self-righteousness but instead urges us to live our vocations and engage in our ministries with humble, contrite hearts – hearts that are capable of being justified – hearts that are, at the same time, accessible to others who need our love, our care, our compassion.

Conclusion

Thank you for your loving witness and service. Some of you have been living consecrated life longer than I’ve been alive – and I’m getting to be pretty old! Added together, your service would probably equal more than a millennium. That’s a lot of consecrated life! On behalf of the entire family of faith of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, I offer you warmest thanks, deepest admiration and respect, and heartfelt prayers, that God will make your witness and your labors ever more fruitful for the good of souls, for the mission of the Church, and for the glory of God.

And may God bless you and keep you always in his love!