

# Archbishop Lori's Homily: Saturday, 4th Week of Lent; Knights of Columbus Board Meeting

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*Knights of Columbus Board Meeting*

*New York City*

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## **Introduction**

Yesterday's readings spoke of the importance of opening our hearts if we would truly know Jesus and be his followers. In our meditation, we were inspired by the presence of St. John Vianney's heart, a heart that embodied life-giving friendship with the Lord Jesus. Today's readings take those reflections one step further by providing us with a three-point meditation on who Jesus is, on the authority with which he spoke and acted, and on the price of the redemption he won for us by his death on the Cross.

## **First, a Word about Jesus' Origins and Identity**

Some in the crowds who heard Jesus' teaching were convinced that "[he was] truly the Prophet", that is to say, the long-expected Messiah. For some of these people, disposed to believe in Jesus, the Messiah would be a prophet like Moses; and indeed in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is portrayed as "the new Moses". Other people in the crowd, also disposed to believe in Jesus, looked for a Messiah who would be a new king and deliverer, descended from David.

For the skeptics in the crowd, however, this was the sticking point. They questioned whether Jesus could be the Messiah because they wrongly thought that he was not descended from David. They knew nothing of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, David's Royal City. They asked: "Does not Scripture say that the Christ will be of David's family and come from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?" Here we might

detect a touch of irony in John's Gospel. Opinionated people, then as now, speak with certitude, but often without knowing the facts!

As Holy Week approaches, what should today's Gospel mean for us? To put it simply, as we prepare to re-encounter solemnly the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, let us not forget what it was we celebrated at Christmas. We celebrated the coming of God's only begotten Son into human history. He who is "God from God, light from light, true God from true God", took flesh, our flesh, our humanity, a humanity descended from David, just as Scripture says, and did so in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary whom we rightfully acclaim as the Mother of God. And why is it important for us to recall the mystery of Christmas in Lent & Holy Week? For this reason: no king, no philosopher, no teacher of ethics could redeem us of sin. Christ is not just another religious founder, a figure in world religions, but truly the Son of God and the Son of Mary. He is utterly unique and uniquely powerful. By his divine power, acting in and through our humanity, he defeated sin and death. In the process, he restored our wounded humanity to friendship with the Father. Let us hold fast to doctrine of the Incarnation as we enter into the Lord's Passion and Death. If we do not understand who died for us, we will not understand what he did for us.

### **Now, a Word about the Authority of Jesus**

Even those who did not understand Jesus' divine origins and identity were astonished by the power and authority of his teaching, for as St. Matthew's Gospel comments, "[Jesus] taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (7:29). Something similar is said in St. Mark's Gospel (1:21). As we read those passages in Scripture, can we not hear the Father's voice, first at Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan and then atop Mt. Tabor at his Transfiguration: "This is my Son, my beloved, listen to him." So as to reveal the authority inherent in his divine origins, Jesus' preaching was accompanied by miraculous signs - signs of feeding, healing, cleansing, and raising from the dead.

The same experience of Jesus' authority evidently took the temple guards by surprise. As we saw in today's Gospel, they had been sent out by the Pharisees to arrest Jesus but they returned empty-handed, or so the Pharisees thought. In fact,

they returned with full hearts, amazed at what they had seen and heard. They said to the Pharisees, “Never before has anyone spoken like this man.” How galling all this was to the Pharisees. They send out guards to arrest Jesus and they return on the brink of faith in Jesus! Even Nicodemus, a colleague, urges them not to rush to judgment.

Romano Guardini comments that, “Faith means to see and risk accepting Christ not only as the greatest teacher of truth that ever lived, but as Truth itself. . . . He is the Logos, the source of Living Truth. He demands not only that we consent intellectually to the correctness of his proclamation—that would only be a beginning— but that we feel with all our natural instinct for right and wrong, with heart and soul, and every cell of our being . . . its claim upon us.” In these words, Guardini describes what our Lenten conversion should be.

### **Finally, a Word about the Price Paid for Our Redemption**

In today’s first reading, Jeremiah speaks of the persecution he endured as a prophet, as one who spoke the truth in the name and power of God. His words infuriated those who were powerful, such that they plotted to do away with him— thereby unwittingly forecasting how the Pharisees would plot to kill Jesus. And in words that also evoke what Jesus would suffer for our salvation, Jeremiah speaks of himself as “a trusting lamb led to the slaughter...” and of the intent of his persecutors to “destroy the tree in its vigor; [to] cut him off from the land of the living so that his name will be spoken no more.”

In the daily celebration of the Eucharist, we address Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”. This image, of course, is drawn from the paschal lamb whose blood delivered the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt, just as Christ’s blood delivers us from the slavery of sin. But it is also an image that should remind us of the innocence of our Savior. Though sinless, “he became sin,” as St. Paul says, that is, he took upon himself the entire weight and burden of our sinful humanity, including my sins and yours. To redeem us, God gave away his only Son – he gave him to us – and in our humanity, Jesus the divine Son died and rose from the dead to conquer what no mere human being could conquer: sin and death. We hear this so often that we take it for granted. But let us not allow ourselves to enter into Holy

Week without a keen sense of the price, the heavy price, that God paid to ransom us from our sins – . . . the costliness of our redemption to the God who gave to us not from his excess but from his very substance.

## **Conclusion**

To remind ourselves of Jesus' true origins, his authoritative claim upon our lives, and the price of our redemption – to do all of this is simply to acknowledge the dimensions of what it means truly to open our hearts to Christ. As today we receive the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ let us see in this mystery the solvent that strips our hearts of all pretention and dissolves their stoniness – so that we might enter upon this last week of Lent and the solemnities of Holy Week with mind and heart renewed! Vivat Jesus!