

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Wednesday, 3rd Week of Easter; Annual Legatus Mass and Dinner

Wednesday, 3rd Week of Easter

Annual Legatus Mass and Dinner

Basilica of the Assumption

May 8, 2019

Introduction

As a seminarian, I was invited to work during the summer at the Apostolic Delegation, now known as the Vatican Embassy. As the name would indicate, it is located on Embassy Row in Washington. As I made my way to work each day, I looked with amazement at the beautiful embassies that line Massachusetts Avenue. I did my best to learn where each country's embassy was located and was even able to identify most of their flags...something I cannot do today!

Somewhere along Massachusetts Avenue, I also developed a wrong impression. Seeing the stately buildings that housed ambassadors and their staffs as also the grand limousines in which they rode, I got the idea that these diplomats lead an easy life. I thought it must be a posh assignment to be an ambassador, especially in the U.S. Then, one morning in 1976, Ambassador Letelier of Chile was assassinated near his embassy by means of a car bomb. It dawned on me that a diplomatic posting was more dangerous than I had imagined. Subsequently, I learned of many ambassadors and diplomats who lost their lives in the process of representing their countries in foreign lands.

Unless missioned to the Grand Duchy of Fenwick where, in the 1959 movie *The Mouse That Roared*, Peter Sellers once reigned in multiple roles, ambassadors face a good deal of pressure, controversy and danger. At a minimum good ambassadors must love their countries and have the knowledge, courage, and finesse to represent their nations in lands and cultures different than their own.

Ambassadors for Christ

Every year, when this Mass is celebrated, I mention the fact that the name of your organization, “Legatus” means “ambassador”. Indeed the word originated in ancient Rome and referred to a legate who was appointed by the Roman Senate and sent on mission to foreign lands. And it should be no secret to you that some people have the same wrong impression about Legatus that I had once had about ambassadors. They may think of you as comfortable, influential people who happen to be Catholic and who are intent on imposing your views and the views of the Church on others.

You and I know that isn’t true but it raises for us the question of how we fulfill our God-given duty to represent Christ and the Church in the wider society, a society that has grown increasingly secular, skeptical, and even hostile to religion in general, to Christianity in particular, and even more so to Catholicism. You are indeed entrusted by the Lord and the Church with the very challenging mission of bearing witness to Christ and to his teaching to people in various walks of life and conditions of life. It requires of you a deep love for the Lord and the Church, knowledge of your faith, an ability to express it with both competence and love, and to find ways to help people see the connection of their personal and professional lives with the Church’s life and faith. As you may have discovered, it is not always easy to do this and we often run the risk of rejection, ridicule, and loss of friendship. Nonetheless, we press onward in the Risen Lord and the Holy Spirit.

Easy and Difficult

In fact, today’s Scripture readings illustrate for us how this difficult and yet how rewarding the mission entrusted to us can be. St. Luke, the author of the Acts of the Apostles, writes of “a severe persecution of the Church in Jerusalem.” He tells of how the members of the Church were dispersed and how Saul – prior to his conversion – was persecuting Christians – dragging them out of their homes, handing them over to be imprisoned.

In this harrowing time, when it was not at all safe to be a Christian, we meet the Apostle Philip who, from the start, was the Lord’s ambassador. You will recall that, when some Greek converts to Judaism wanted to see Jesus, it was Philip whom they contacted with the request, “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.” In today’s reading,

Philip is Jesus' ambassador in a new way. Philip preached the Word of God in a way that riveted the people. And then he extended the healing touch of Jesus toward all who were sick, including the paralyzed and the possessed, and they were cured. In the midst of persecution, Philip brought to the scattered Christian community a joy and peace which no one and nothing could take away from them. C. Parts of the Church, in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere, continue to experience overt, blood persecution at the hands of hostile government and terrorists, while in the west we tend to experience what Pope Francis aptly termed, "a polite persecution", that is, a subtle but firm exclusion of our faith from society and a readiness to criticize anyone who professes the Catholic faith too openly. Like Philip we need to be joyous, generous, witnesses to Jesus even when those around us suggest that we're better off keeping quiet.

The reading from St. John's Gospel hints at other pressures in serving as faithful ambassadors for Christ. Jesus is in the midst of the Bread of Life discourse in which he reveals himself as the true bread come down from heaven. In his inspired words, we find the basis for our belief in the Eucharist, the bread and wine that are changed completely into Christ's Body and Blood that nourish our souls with heavenly food and strengthens us as members of the Church, the Body of Christ. Further on in the Gospel of John, we see that Jesus himself encountered skepticism and rejection as he spoke just as we sometimes encounter skepticism and rejection when we bear witness to our Eucharistic faith and encourage the unchurched to return to Sunday Mass. Nonetheless, we press onward, for, as ambassadors we are representing no earthly country but our heavenly homeland. For that reason, we can never give in to discouragement.

Conclusion

At the beginning of Lent St. Paul addressed us as an ambassador of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20) and now as Lent gives way to Easter and Easter to Pentecost, we are called to take up anew our calling to be ambassadors, legates for Christ in a world so subject to its own futility, a world that is groaning and longing, even if it doesn't know it, for what it is, or better, who it is we represent, the Risen Lord Jesus who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever!