

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Feast of St. John XXIII; Knights of Columbus Board Meeting

Friday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time

Feast of St. John XXIII

Knights of Columbus Board Meeting

Santa Fe, New Mexico

Oct. 11, 2019

St. John XXIII

Today we celebrate the feast of St. John XXIII, the endearing “interim” Pope, who was supposed to give the Church a ‘breather’ but instead, by deciding to convoke the II Vatican Council, opened the way for the Holy Spirit to breathe anew upon the Church so as to bring about an authentic renewal of the Church’s life and mission.

In the intervening decades, we have discovered one of history’s painful lessons: the renewal of the Church is difficult, complex, and elusive, and ultimately beyond our limited vision, abilities, and strength. Indeed, the path to renewal has taken detours, twists, and turns that even the saintly John XXIII could not foresee.

The Cry of Joel the Prophet

For instance, does not Joel’s admonition have a distressingly contemporary ring to it? “Gird yourselves and weep, O priests,” says the prophet, “Wail, O ministers of the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God.” Connecting the dots in today’s reading, we come away convinced that it was the sinful behavior of those Old Testament priests that brought desolation upon the Temple and indeed upon all God’s People. But Joel’s admonition applies to the priests and bishops of our day as much or more than it applied to the priests of his day. To say the least, contemporary betrayals of trust have gravely harmed the Church.

When the Church began its renewal, few realized what a deep and painful

conversion the Church would need to undergo if it would truly be renewed in the Holy Spirit, a profound conversion, beginning with those of us who are bishops and priests. The various changes introduced into the life of the Church did not, of themselves, bring about the renewal of which the Council documents speak; nor will procedures and policies devised for the safety of young people and the accountability of bishops, in and of themselves, bring about renewal. Indeed, all such measures done in the name of renewal are insufficient without a truly humble and repentant spirit that extends throughout the Church, a common cry, “from the rising of the sun to its setting” – “create in me a clean heart.”

To be sure, in many quarters of the Church, authentic renewal has taken hold and the good fruit of the Council envisioned by St. John XXIII has come about. God continues to raise up holy men and women to serve the Church endowed with the Spirit’s gifts and charisms; there are vibrant parishes, prayer groups, charities, and indeed the list goes on. We see the good fruit of the II Vatican Council in the Knights of Columbus which stands at the forefront of the Church’s mission of evangelization, charity, the renewal of the family, defense of human life and religious freedom and so much more. Yet, overall, it often seems as if renewal of this sort is largely out of reach. For every time we think we’ve turned the corner, there is more bad news, a widening scope of the scandal, and declines in sacramental practice. More than once I’ve wondered if I will live long enough to see this scandal wane.

The Finger of God

As we confront the intractability of this scandal, it is way past time to recognize that we are dealing with an adversary more cunning and relentless than we imagine, an adversary who uses human weakness to thwart and derail authentic renewal and spoil the Church’s mission of evangelization. That adversary is the very one Jesus cast out of a man as today’s Gospel reading opens—Satan, Beelzebub, the prince of demons.

He hides in the shadows of contemporary skepticism over his very existence, but he and his cohort are real, and they are active in this, and indeed, in every scandalous chapter in the Church’s history. In today’s Gospel, we see another kind of skepticism, still afoot today. Some doubt that Jesus is a man of God and even wonder

if he might not be a sorcerer, in league with the devil himself. Let us share in neither form of skepticism. The devil is real and Jesus is stronger than all the powers of darkness combined. And indeed it was and is by 'the finger of God' that Jesus casts out demons, that is to say, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is the way you and I need to pray about the crisis in the Church and about the long and winding road of the Church's renewal. We need to ask the Lord, by the finger of God, i.e., by the power of the Holy Spirit, to cast out the demons that can inhabit our hearts and our homes, the demons that can infiltrate the Church and its leadership, the demons that deceive and delude us so as to hold us in their unholy thrall. What's more, we must ask of Jesus that the finger of God would touch us, touch our leaders, indeed the whole Church, so as to cleanse, repair, and renew it. When we pray for the Church's renewal in this way, we come to understand that it is not our good will or planning that brings renewal - for our unaided efforts soon run out of energy and become ineffective. Instead, we must tap into an energy, a grace that is supernatural, the energy, the power, the grace that comes to us through the Holy Spirit, the finger of God who touches us with the purifying and renewing mercy of the Trinity.

And how is it possible for us today to be touched by the finger of God, we may ask. What we need to realize is that the Holy Spirit is already reaching out to us, to each member of the Body of Christ, to each member of the Church, to touch us with power flowing from the Risen Lord. For us it is a matter of believing, consenting, abandoning ourselves in utmost docility to the Holy Spirit - something we find hard to do.

Our Lady of Guadalupe

Indeed such openness and docility to the Holy Spirit is unthinkable without the aid of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Lady of Guadalupe. When obstacles confronting the Church's mission in America seemed insurmountable, the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to the humble Juan Diego, the woman clothed with the sun, that is the rays of the Holy Spirit, and in her wake the Church's mission in America flourished beyond human reckoning. In this venerable place dedicated to her, let us pray that Mary would gently but firmly guide and encourage us to open our hearts anew to

her divine Son so as to be touched, indeed possessed by his Spirit. Only then can we take our part in advancing the Church's mission. Vivat Jesus!