

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time; Mass in Honor of San Lorenzo Ruiz and San Pedro Calungsod

26th Sunday Ordinary Time

Mass in Honor of San Lorenzo Ruiz and San Pedro Calungsod

Cathedral of Mary Our Queen

Sept. 30, 2018

After three nights of prayer and reflection, we have gathered here at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen for this Holy Mass honoring two beloved Filipino saints, San Lorenzo Ruiz and San Pedro Calungsod. It is a joy to see all of you gathered in this great Cathedral, your spiritual home, and to share with you this day of joy, a joy we share most intensely at the Eucharistic table, but also a joy that extends to the fiesta that follows on the plaza and indeed a joy that should extend into our daily lives.

We celebrate the lives of two Holy Martyrs – San Lorenzo Ruiz, the first Filipino saint and San Pedro Calungsod both of whom were courageous witnesses for Christ. Let us view these two great saints through the lens of today's Scripture readings, noting along the way what these saints have to say to us living and working and ministering in these very challenging days... beginning with the reading from the Letter of James.

The Letter of James: Loving Christ More Than Riches

To tell you the truth, today's reading from the Letter of James is unsettling. It is an out-and-out condemnation of those who are rich. St. James goes after those who hoard money and riches, telling them that their treasures will corrode and rot. James also calls out those who get rich on the backs of other people, especially those who withhold what rightfully belongs to the poor, such as the wages of a day laborer. And finally, James warns us against a life of self-centered luxury, a life all wrapped up in

one's comfort and convenience.

Even if we don't think of ourselves as being particularly wealthy these are hard words for most of us to hear. For we live in a country that maintains a high standard of living and in comparison with conditions in much of the world, those who live in the United States lead rather comfortable lives. What does San Lorenzo and San Pedro have to say to us? Clearly, money, riches, power, and comfort were not the driving force of their lives. San Lorenzo, who lived in the 17th century, was married with three children and was serving as a calligrapher at a parish run by Dominican friars when he was unjustly implicated in a murder. His relatively modest but comfortable life was abruptly uprooted as he was whisked away on a missionary journey to Japan. Instead of complaining about all that he left behind, San Lorenzo joyfully embraced his new missionary vocation – proclaiming the name of Christ in the most difficult mission field imaginable. Or take the example of San Pedro who also lived in the 17th century. We don't know a lot about the details of his early life but we do know that by the age of 14 he was chosen by Spanish Jesuits to go on a missionary journey to the Marianas Islands, & eventually to Guam. San Pedro and his fellow missionaries endured terrible hardships & deprivations but they pressed forward on their mission to proclaim the name of Christ, spreading the Christian faith not by force but by the power of love.

What we see in San Lorenzo and San Pedro is that they loved Christ more than they loved anything that they possessed. They were willing to leave everything behind for Christ. Let us ask ourselves if we find a similar love for Christ in our hearts. What would we be willing to give up for love of Christ or to spread his Name? If there is anything we love more than Christ, we need to rid ourselves of it!

Avoiding Scandal: Authentic Witnesses

There is a second powerful challenge in today's Scripture readings, namely, Jesus' words about rooting sin out of our lives. Again, these are words that make us distinctly uncomfortable. In no uncertain terms, Jesus warns against scandalizing the innocent and vulnerable— words which Church leaders such as myself must take to heart as we grapple with the abuse crisis and the failure of episcopal leadership to address allegations of abuse with candor and thoroughness. In fact, the Lord is

telling us what scandal really is – it's bad behavior, sinful behavior on our part that gives people reason not to believe, that causes people to walk away from their faith and participation in the Church's life. When we are inauthentic witnesses, when our lives contradict what we profess, even if we think our sins are not particularly notorious, we can in fact give scandal.

Jesus urges us to get rid of all forms of sinful corruption in our lives. He tells us that if our hand or our foot or our eyes cause us to sin, we should get rid of them – and we say – does he really mean this? It's the Lord's way of saying that in his grace we need to root sin out of our lives. And what is it that we see in the lives of San Lorenzo and San Pedro? It is very clear that from a very early age, they had renounced sin, turned their back on Satan, and had allowed the Lord to purify their hearts from sin. As a result, when they went to foreign lands to preach the Gospel, the people they addressed first recognized the goodness of their humanity, a humanity shaped by the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. And attracted to such goodness, they opened their hearts to the Gospel. Against all odds, many were converted to Christ and to the faith of the Church. Ultimately, the purity of their witness to Christ was tested when they faced the prospect of martyrdom, indeed a very painful death. When they laid down their lives in imitation of the Christ who died for us, they demonstrated the radiant, luminous authenticity of their witness to the Gospel.

We may not be called to die a martyr's death but our faith is indeed tested – tested in a secular, godless culture to which we can so often easily capitulate, tested by peer pressure which urges us to engage in sinful behavior, tested by false teachings, tested by the scandals in the Church as we see many walk away from the faith. Let us follow the example of these two great saints in bearing authentic witness to Jesus by the goodness of our lives!

Book of Numbers & the Gospel of Mark: Need for Companions

There is a third lesson in today's readings for us, a lesson illustrated by the lives of our two patron saints, namely, the need we have for companions in the faith. Christianity is not something we practice privately – it is something we do together. In the Book of Numbers, Moses assembled 70 elders and imparted to them the spirit

of prophecy – a spirit that reached even Eldad and Medad who were outside the camp. When Joshua was worried about this fact, Moses told him – “Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets!” In the Gospel, Jesus’ closest followers are disturbed to see a man who was not yet a close follower of the Master driving out demons. John goes to Jesus with this problem and Jesus, like Moses, tells him not to worry. “For whoever is not against us is with us,” Jesus said. What about the missionary journeys of San Lorenzo and San Pedro? Neither saint ever got into the boat by himself. They went on their missionary journeys with companions and they died together with their companions. Like the Lord’s first disciples, they found strength and comfort in being together, in ties of faith and friendship, and in openness to others who wanted to join them. So too, if we would truly follow Christ and be his disciples, we need to stay close with each other, to remain united in faith and friendship, to build up the Filipino Catholic community in the Archdiocese of Baltimore & beyond. In this way, we will never journey alone, never bear witness alone, but always in the company of holy companions and friends.

Conclusion

This is a beautiful day for the Filipino Saints Fiesta! It is a beautiful day to celebrate the Filipino heritage, language, and presence, a vibrant faith, a resilient spirit, a solidarity built on faith that greatly enriches and strengthens the Archdiocese of Baltimore! Thank you for your fidelity, your love, your witness to Jesus! May the Lord bless you and keep you always in his love!