

Archbishop Lori's Homily: American Catholic Historical Association

Saturday, 2nd Week of Easter

American Catholic Historical Association

Mount Saint Mary's University

Emmitsburg, MD

April 14, 2018

First I am happy to welcome you, leaders and members of the American Catholic Historical Association to the “Premier See”, the Archdiocese of Baltimore. And how good that you are meeting here, at Mount Saint Mary's University and Seminary, the second oldest Catholic institution of higher learning in the United States.

I don't need to tell you about the historical significance of either the Archdiocese of Baltimore or Mount Saint Mary's. In fact, you could tell me more than a thing or two. But as a proud alumnus of the Mount and as Archbishop of Baltimore, I can tell you that I am living with history and that I am happy to do so. Not a day goes by without my being keenly conscious of the fact that I am a successor of the likes of Carroll, Spalding, and Gibbons. I live in a residence where the American bishops met in the 19th century as the church spread and grew across these United States, assumed in institutional form, and grappled with the issues of the day. Many parishes in the Archdiocese have deep roots in Maryland soil, as do our Catholic schools, charities, and other ministries. Through the years, the Archdiocese has been blessed with saints such as St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, St. John Neumann, & Bl. Francis Seelos, and by generations of extraordinary religious women and men, diocesan priests, lay leaders representing this local church in its diversity. Nor can I miss the vitality of this University and Seminary as we head deeper into the 21st century - what a blessing for so many!

History reflects humanity, as you know better than I, and as followers of Christ and members of his Body, the Church, we are aware our humanity stands in need of redemption. Thus, in studying the history of a local church I love and am privileged

to serve, I cannot ignore chapters in our history that are less than glorious, chapters in which human weakness is in full view – such as the complicity of church leadership with slavery, a reality that is being explored in these days by a state-wide commission I convened. History not only informs and inspires but also can lead to repentance and to firm purpose of amendment, individually and ecclesially.

In these days we commemorate most solemnly the death and resurrection of the Incarnate Son of God: the post-Resurrection appearances of the Risen Lord, the institution of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the derring-do of the Apostles as they begin to spread the faith – Yes, in these days, we find renewed life and joy in the Church's living memory. Due to the Church's living memory, overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, the great events that brought us new life in Christ do not recede in the mists of history but remain fresh, alive, and powerful, most especially in the celebration of the Mass and the Sacraments. Thus we are swept up and redeemed in the very mysteries we celebrate. And in the communion of saints, we not only remember those who have gone before us; we are also in their company as members of Christ. These who lived before us, in times both similar and different from our own, are our brothers and sisters with whom we have communion in the Risen Lord.

This gives us something of a different take on history. The persons, events, and cultures that you study with all academic rigor are part of the mystery, the Father's plan of redemption, revealed in Christ, a plan that unfolds as the ages run their course. Somehow the struggles, accomplishments, misunderstandings, foibles, and virtues of those who have gone before us in faith are part of that unfolding plan. We can detect the hand of Providence in the persons and events of the past, as indeed in our own lives of faith and in our endeavors. Those who preceded us have handed on the faith and their own lives and their times have much to say to us now. And while our communion with them in Christ does not exempt us from the rigors of research, publishing, and teaching, it does give us a certain reverence for the subject matter we are handling!

John Paul II shed light on this in his book, "Identity and Memory". I can't do justice to the subtlety of his thought, but in a phrase, he said that remembering has to do with our identity. Conversely when we fail to remember, we undermine our identity

as human beings, as members of a society and a culture, and as members of the Church.

The work that you do is essential, in my view, for an expectant church whose identity and mission hinge on remembrance – “Do this in memory of me!” The fruits of your research, publications, and teachings put flesh and blood, names, faces, dates, and context on those are part of the great mystery of a humanity redeemed yet still working out its redemption in fear and trembling. If we would be ourselves, indeed the best version of ourselves, we must first and foremost pay our homage to the Word of God as we would to a lamp shining in darkness; but we must also pay attention to those who went ahead of us – those whose lives in some way intersected with the Church’s mission, carried out, as Henri De Lubac wrote, “at the very heart of earth reality, right at the core of all the confusion and all the mischances which are, inevitably, involved in its mission for men.” Indeed, we are called to love the Church not only as she appears ideally but also as she appears in history, including the present moment in which we live.

Sadly we live in an age of forgetfulness – but happily yours is a mission and ministry of remembrance. Thank you! And may God bless your labors and make them fruitful in the lives of succeeding generations, in the Church, and in the world. God bless you and keep you always in his love!