

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Blessing of Calvary Grotto; 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Blessing of Calvary Grotto

St. Bartholomew Church

Manchester, Maryland

September 3, 2017

It is a pleasure to return to St. Bartholomew Parish and to share with you a part of the last weekend of the summer season. I'm told that school starts on Tuesday, an event that will be greeted with much happiness by parents if not also by students. It is also a day when we, as a nation, pray for the victims of Hurricane Harvey, asking that those who lost their lives be granted eternal life and asking that those who remain may quickly rebuild their lives, even as we respond to their needs generously.

And thank you, Father Roach, for inviting me to celebrate Holy Mass and also to **bless the beautiful new Calvary Grotto** which you and your parish family have built to give honor to the Savior. In a special way, I want to thank the Knights of Columbus, St. Bartholomew Council, for all you have done to create and construct this beautiful place of prayer and witness to the Crucified Savior. May it be always a beloved place of prayer and devotion; a shrine to the sacrificial love of the Savior who died to save us from our sins; a place of peace and rest where the Crucified Savior's heart can speak to our hearts.

As we offer this Holy Mass and bless the Calvary Grotto, let us not forget that the Cross is a sign of contradiction. You recall that, soon after his birth, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple where Simeon took the Child into his arms, looked at Mary, and told her that her infant Son would be a sign of contradiction and that Mary would be pierced with a sword of sorrow.

In today's Gospel this prediction has come to pass. No sooner had St. Peter

professed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the Living God, than he contradicted the Savior who confided to his disciples that he would suffer, die, and rise from the dead. Yes, Peter believed in Jesus as the Messiah but he was not prepared to believe in a Messiah who would suffer and die. Like many others, Peter persisted in looking for a Messiah who would deliver his people from the military and political oppression. But Jesus rebuked Peter sharply because he was thinking, not as God, but as human beings do.

When we look upon a Crucifix and see the image of the Incarnate Son of God who laid down his life for us and for our salvation – then we begin to see the difference between how God thinks and how we think. We so often think first of our self-interest and about our own priorities and plans; we think about the short term goals we hope to achieve and the problems and sorrows we hope to solve and/or avoid, and naturally enough. Yet, our every self-centered thought and plan is contradicted by the Cross, in which God the Father utterly gives away his own Son to us, his Son who pours out his life for us in self-giving love. As we look upon a Crucifix and see the consecrated Host uplifted, let our eyes of faith see and our inmost hearts perceive a love like no other love – a merciful love that no amount of human ingenuity could plan for or conceive of.

And even as Jesus rebukes Peter for his wrong-headed concern, so too the Lord addresses his disciples and all of us. He says we can follow him only if we deny ourselves and take up our cross. We may forget how stunning those words were to the disciples who first heard them. When we hear these familiar words of Jesus, we may think about patiently bearing with life's daily inconveniences – and we should, because this is part of the Christian life. Yet, when the first disciples heard Jesus say, “pick up your cross,” they saw the image of a criminal, carrying a crossbeam on his back, on his way to execution amid the jeering of the crowd – precisely what Jesus would endure for us and for our salvation.

Surely, Jesus does want us to bear our daily hardships cheerfully and it is in these every-day sacrifices we make for others that we gradually grow in the likeness of Christ. Yet, as we meditate on this Gospel and look upon Christ crucified, do we not see that Jesus is asking more of us? He who pours out his love upon us in the Sacraments of the Church and gives us all graces we need to pick up our cross and

follow him – this Jesus is asking that we learn to think as he thinks and to love as he loves ... to think first of our Father in heaven and his plan to save us and at the time to think of our neighbor before we think of our own needs. And Jesus is asking us not merely to love those who can repay us but generously to love and serve those who are in need in our midst. For it is when we lose our lives in loving service to others that we find a joy unlike any other.

Many of our contemporaries think all this is nonsense. In our culture, it's me-first, all the way, 24-7. There are wonderful exceptions, of course, and many examples of neighborly love... we've seen lots of self-giving love in the wake of Hurricane Harvey and so many in your parish give of themselves unstintingly. But in the main powerful forces in our culture teach us to be self-absorbed and goad us to be angry when we don't get our way. Our culture teaches us, and sometimes we willingly comply, to put our own comfort and our will ahead of everyone and everything else.

Paul tells us that when we look upon the Crucifix, we must undergo a profound change of mind and heart. Self-giving love isn't merely a nice idea that we easily adopt. It requires of us resolve not to conform ourselves with this age – not to go along to get along, but rather to be transformed by the renewal of our minds and hearts, as St. Paul said. When we pray privately every day, pray the Rosary, examine our consciences, go to Confession regularly, attend Mass devoutly and attentively each Sunday, form our children in the Catholic Faith, and serve the needs of others –as we do all this and more, the self-giving love of Jesus overtakes us and re-shapes our poor sinful hearts after the image of his own magnanimous heart.

Dear friends, as we encounter the mystery of the Cross in this Mass and as we look upon Jesus Crucified in the new Grotto, let us call upon Mary, who stood beneath the Cross and shared fully in Jesus' sacrifice of love. Jesus entrusted Mary to John the Beloved Disciple as his mother and in doing so, entrusted Mary to us as our Mother.

May she intercede for us and lead us to her Son Jesus who lives and reigns in the unity of the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen!