

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Chrism Mass 2018

Chrism Mass

Cathedral of Mary Our Queen

March 26, 2018

The little chapel in my home was designed to be “all Baltimore all the time”. Its design and palette reprise Benjamin Latrobe’s vision for America’s first Cathedral. The relics in the altar are of Baltimore’s saints and *beati*: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, St. John Neumann, Blessed Francis Seelos, Blessed Stanley Rother, and soon, we hope and pray, Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange.

So, in a Baltimore-centric chapel, why do you find a portrait of Blessed John Henry Newman, replete with a relic and his coat of arms? My first line of defense for this is that Cardinal Gibbons and Cardinal Newman corresponded with one another and that Gibbons visited Newman in Birmingham on his way back from Rome. All that’s true enough, but the plain truth is . . . I just like Cardinal Newman and I especially like his episcopal motto, “*Cor ad cor loquitur*” – “heart speaks to heart”. His motto, drawn from the writings of St. Francis de Sales, speaks powerfully to me of the personal relationship between God and myself attainable through prayer.

Some days ago, Pope Francis ordained three bishops at St. Peter’s in Rome, bishops who will serve as papal nuncios in various parts of the world. Apparently the Pope departed from his prepared text to talk about prayer. He said that the first task of the bishop is to pray. “A bishop who does not pray (he said) does not accomplish his duty, does not fulfill his vocation.” Among the many things that lay claim to my waking hours (and some of my sleeping hours) . . . prayer must take pride of place.

Dear brother priests, I hope you feel the same way. Busy as we are, pulled in so many directions as we are, facing so many differing expectations as we do – how tempting it is to relegate prayer to a lower place on our list of priorities. But prayer is so important that it shouldn’t be put off until the end of the day when our powers of concentration and our energy are depleted. While it’s dangerous for me to argue

with the Venerable Bede, I do disagree with him when he says that ‘at night our minds are ready for contemplation.’ I don’t know about you, but at night, I can hardly keep my eyes open... The challenge for me and the challenge for you is to give the Lord the first fruits of our day, our very best hours, the time of day when we could accomplish a thousand and one things, that one hour in the day when we’re raring to go! That’s the time to withdraw for prayer, preferably before the Blessed Sacrament, so that the Lord’s heart can speak to our heart and our heart can speak to his. Of course, if we *also* want to give the Lord our less than optimal hours, that’s o.k. too. I once told a spiritual director that one night I fell asleep on the Lord while in chapel. “Don’t worry about it,” he said, “when you’re asleep, you cause God less trouble.”

Pope Benedict helps us see why prayer is critically important for all we do as priests, especially preaching the Word and celebrating the Sacraments. He speaks of how easy it is for all of us, including bishops and priests, to be entrapped in a vicious circle of negativity, marked by sin, doubt, and anxiety. We’ve said “yes” to the Lord, yet in our hearts there can be a lurking “no” – an inner resistance to the Word we preach and the Sacraments we celebrate; a resentment that builds when demands are great and appreciation is sparse. Only prayer breaks the grip of negativity on our hearts, in whatever form it exists. In prayer, we surrender to the Cross that lurking “no” and instead embrace Jesus’ own loving “yes” to God the Father on our behalf. For “[t]he ‘yes’ of Jesus Christ that I hand on is only really *his* if it has also become completely *mine*.”

The “yes” of Jesus Christ is on full display as he addresses the congregation in his hometown synagogue of Nazareth. He makes his own the prophecy of Isaiah when he says, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”

Before those words of Jesus, the Christ, serve to model the anointing and mission we received in priestly ordination, his words are first and foremost addressed *to us, to our hearts*. Before we proclaim good news to the poor, let us first ask Jesus to make us lovers of the poor and vulnerable, and priests who are poor in spirit and simple in

our needs. Before we proclaim liberty to captives – to the captives of racism, economic injustice, violence and addictions, let us ask the Lord to unfetter us from whatever holds us captive, whatever it is that habitually clouds our conscience and restrains our witness to him. Before we proclaim sight to the blind, let us ask the Lord to open the eyes of our soul so that we may begin to see ourselves as God sees us and as others see us... to remove the blind spots which all of us have, myself very much included. And before we declare a year of favor from the Lord, a renewed time of mercy and compassion in the life of the Church, let us *first* receive the mercy of which we are the stewards, by frequenting the Sacrament of Reconciliation, by sound spiritual direction, and by continually asking the Lord to grant us “a humble, contrite heart”. This is how I ensure that the “yes” of Jesus Christ which I hand on is really his – because in prayer I have first made it my own.

In the same homily in which the Pope identified prayer as the first task of a bishop, he also admonished bishops to stay close to their priests – and surely his words give this bishop, ‘me your unworthy servant’, much to think and pray about, as I consider my own ministry to you, brother priests. For my shortcomings, many as they are, I ask your forgiveness. So too, I ask for the grace to be a wise and understanding shepherd who is readily available to you, supportive, truthful, and loving.

There is much that brings us together in the course of a year. Being together as priests is not really optional but is rather a way of being co-responsible, supportive, and loving to one another in our priesthood. But the most powerful way we come together is in our daily prayer. When I sit down to pray of a morning, it is the great support and comfort to know that priests throughout the Archdiocese are doing the same thing – opening their hearts to the Lord, pondering Scripture, wrestling with distraction, and finding fresh consolation and hope as the Lord speaks to our hearts, & we to his. Many of you live by yourselves and some at a great distance so the danger of isolation from brother priests and from local church itself exists. The IRS may classify us as “self-employed” but in fact we are all part of a presbyterium – a fraternity of prayer – a unity of Word, Sacrament, and Service.

On this night, I join my brother priests in thanking you, the laity and religious, who represent parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Thank you for your presence here this evening, thank you for living your vocations, especially to

marriage and family, and for your devoted service to the Church. Thank you for the support and prayers which you so generously extend to us, your priests. With you we form a partnership of prayer and apply ourselves to the common task of spreading the Gospel, winning back the lapsed, reaching out to the searching. With you we form a partnership of faith, worship, and service. Please continue to pray for us your priests; please pray for our seminarians and for the many young people who are considering a priestly or religious vocation, many of them are here tonight... and count always on our daily intercession for you, your loved ones & your needs.

Together - may we be God's Holy People in the Archdiocese of Baltimore - alive and united in prayer, truly a light brightly visible. May God bless us and keep us always in his love!