

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; Knights of Columbus State Deputies Meeting

Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Knights of Columbus State Deputies Meeting

New Haven, CT

June 8, 2018

Let me briefly introduce you to a fourth century theologian, an English monk by the name of Pelagius ... in our day, not exactly a household name. Back in the late 4th & early 5th centuries, however, Pelagius was known far and wide. He was respected as a man of learning, penitence, and holiness. He was sought out as a spiritual director. His writings were widely circulated. And his opinions influenced many people, including bishops and rulers. But Pelagius was mistaken, badly mistaken. He grossly overestimated the role that human effort plays in salvation. It's not just that he was overly optimistic; by all accounts, Pelagius truly thought we could imitate Christ without relying on the help of Christ. Then as now, the Church sees this view of things as a serious danger to our faith. In his recent exhortation, for example, Pope Francis cited Pelagianism as a subtle but very real enemy to holiness, discipleship, & ultimately to our salvation. Instead of recognizing that everything depends on God's love and mercy, we begin to think that everything depends upon us - upon our efforts, our wisdom and cleverness, our good will.

So, why is Pope Francis so concerned about a 4th century heresy? And what does Pelagianism have to do with us and with our Order? Have we become a band of card-carrying Pelagians? Is overt Pelagianism running rampant through our ranks? Hardly. You know, the devil doesn't usually operate in such an obvious way. Rather, the temptation to be overly reliant on our own efforts and good will is subtle, and

unless we are vigilant, Satan will stealthily insinuate this false way of thinking into our best efforts to profess and live the principal of charity. We may even profess in public and in private that our works of charity are the result of God's grace and not our own merit. But Satan, the father of lies, pats us on the back and whispers in our ears that it is really ourselves, not God, who accomplishes all these good works.

But we might ask this question: If we've worked hard to implement a successful program of service, what's the harm in taking a little credit and getting well-deserved recognition? Again, the devil doesn't do his dirty work out in the open. He sometimes uses legitimate recognition and approval to sow the seeds of disunity and dissension in our ranks. When Satan tempts us to imagine that we are solely responsible for the good we do, then we attach too much importance to being recognized and praised. We move ourselves into center stage and leave God in the wings. Or to put it another way, we fail to recognize that in our partnership with God, we are decidedly the junior partner. In turn, such a craving for recognition and praise is bound to rub one's fellow Knights the wrong way and thus one ends up sinning not only against charity but also against fraternity and unity as well. Meanwhile, Satan celebrates and looks for the next opportunity to disrupt and corrupt the good intentions and the good works of the Order. That's why the warning against old Pelagius is timely and relevant for us!

That is also why it is a wonderful grace to look toward a new fraternal year by celebrating, as we do today, the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. For, as Pope Pius XII wrote many years ago, "The Sacred Heart of Jesus ... is quite rightly considered the chief sign and symbol of that love ... with which the divine Redeemer rightly loves the Eternal Father and all human beings without exception" (Pius XII, *Haurietis aquas*, 1956). The best way and surest way for us to overcome any and all temptations to take pride in our goodness and love and to seek that untoward pat on the back is to allow ourselves to be immersed in the infinite love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Happily, there are three ways we can do this right now, in this very liturgy: The first way is to take to heart what the Lord has told us today in Scripture. The second is to receive Our Lord worthily in Holy Communion. The third way is for us to consecrate ourselves and our Order to the Sacred Heart... Scripture speaks powerfully to us of

God's loving heart. The prophet Hosea sums up where we stand in the sight of God. He tells how God the Father nurtured the fledgling people of Israel – loving his people the way a parent loves a child, teaching them to walk, feeding them, caressing them in love. In spite of Israel's dependence on God, it often rebelled against him. Like an unruly teenager, Israel declared its independence from God. Isn't this a good description of our Pelagian tendencies? We're dependent upon God for everything but we pretend to be self-sufficient. As a result, we stumble and fall into sin.

Surveying our plight, God does not allow his blazing wrath to consume us. Instead, his heart is overwhelmed, moved with pity. And in his love for us, God sends us his only Son who assumed our humanity, including a heart, a soul, *by which and in which* he revealed the uttermost depth of his Father's love. Taking upon himself our sins and dying upon the Cross, Jesus reveals "the breadth and length and height and depth" of his Father's love, a love that is stronger than sin and more powerful than death itself.

In the heart of Jesus pierced by the soldier's lance this love becomes palpable, real, utterly available to us. For from his pierced heart, there flows water and blood, the source of the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist. By sharing in those sacraments, by receiving Holy Communion worthily, we share in that divine love to be found only in depths of Christ's Sacred Heart. In Holy Communion we receive "the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge" – we receive that fullness of God's love which flows from heart of Jesus. This is the source and font of that charity which forms the heart of our Order. This is the source and font of our ability to do the works of charity in such a way as to be pleasing in God's sight and a source of joy for others.

Dear friends, there is no better antidote to the subtle influence of the devil's malevolence than for us to open our hearts to the love flowing from the Heart of Jesus. When we are immersed in this love, when we glory in it, give thanks for it, find in it the source of all virtues, find in it the source of our own charity – when we do this, we frustrate the plans of the evil one, and that's a good thing.

Accordingly, as we look to a new fraternal year, let us now, in this very liturgy,

solemnly consecrate ourselves and the Order to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the love flowing from his divine heart. In a solidarity of faith, let us acknowledge our utter dependence on his love to lead good lives, to embrace the ideals of Columbianism, to exercise leadership in the Order, and to practice that charity which shares in, reflects, and proclaims the love, found only in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. And let us consecrate ourselves by turning to the prayer of Pope Leo XIII:

“Most sweet Jesus, Redeemer of the human race, look down upon us, humbly prostrate before your altar. We are yours and yours we wish to be; but to be more surely united with you, behold each one of us freely consecrates himself today to your Most Sacred Heart.

Grant, O Lord, to your Church, assurance of freedom and immunity from harm; give peace and order to all nations, and make the earth resound from pole to pole with one cry: Praise to the Divine Heart that wrought our salvation; to the Sacred Heart of Jesus be glory and honor forever! Amen!” Vivat Jesus!