

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Our Lady of the Rosary; Maryland Women's Conference

Our Lady of the Rosary

Maryland Women's Conference

Immaculate Conception Chapel; Mount Saint Mary's University

October 7, 2017

I am delighted, once again, to offer Mass for the Maryland Women's Conference. For this year retreat, you've chosen the theme: "Fire Within". It is weekend when you gather in prayer, reflection, and fellowship so as to open your hearts more widely to the fire of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who ignites in our hearts an ardent love of Jesus. That love is fanned into flame by prayer, by a life of discipleship, and by sharing the Gospel with our family, our loved ones, our friends & colleagues.

In the Gospel reading from St. Luke, we meet the Lord's earliest disciples. After spending time with Jesus and after being formed by him, a fire was lit in their hearts and they went out to proclaim the Gospel. Their first missionary venture was a resounding success. They returned to the Lord and told him with great excitement, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name."

And Jesus confirmed the success of their mission, telling them that he saw "Satan fall like lightning from the sky" and telling them nothing and no one could really harm them. But Jesus also admonished his disciples (and us as well) not to rejoice in their power over the spirit of evil but rather to rejoice over the fact that their "names are written in heaven" . . .that is to say, that we are the beloved adopted

children of our Heavenly Father.

Well, maybe you've had a similar experience. Maybe you've grown up Catholic and let's say your faith formation wasn't all it should be –but then you start to take your faith seriously and a fire is lit in your heart. You develop a living and personal relationship with the Lord. You open your hearts to the Scriptures and the Church's teaching –And, then, when you're put on the spot or asked about your faith, you shine like the stars . . . you are joyful, persuasive, and courageous... and you overcome all those “demons” that keep people from believing.

I'm going to guess that at your earliest opportunity you'll seek the Lord out in prayer and tell him in amazement what you were able to do in his name and because of his name. But let's not stop there! Let's see what else this morning's Gospel tells us as Jesus turns from talking to his disciples so as to address his Father in heaven. Filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit, Jesus utters a prayer – giving thanks to God the Father that mysteries of heaven are revealed, not to the learned and self-important, but to the child-like and the simple – to the poor in spirit, the pure of heart, the meek and humble, those mourning over sin, those thirsting for holiness and justice, those who are persecuted for their faith. These are the child-like to whom the mysteries of the Kingdom are confided. These are the ones in whom the fire of divine charity burns brightly, for they share in the truth and love of the Most Holy Trinity.

On this Feast of the Most Holy Rosary, we might ask ourselves how we can be *those* disciples to whom the mysteries of the Kingdom are confided. How can we daily kindle the fire of divine charity in our hearts? How can we daily spend time with Jesus so as to absorb in our hearts the mysteries of his life, death, and resurrection? How can we be daily formed as disciples capable of leaving our comfort zone and going forth, to the peripheries, in search of those who are poor, vulnerable, and searching for truth and love?

One time-tested and utter reliable answer to these questions is, simply, the Rosary... the Most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In talking about missionary discipleship, Pope Francis once challenged his congregation. He pulled a Rosary from his pocket and asked the crowd if they also carried a Rosary with them . . . and most answered, “yes”!

“But do you *pray* the Rosary?” he wanted to know. Come to find out, the Pope prays the entire Rosary every day... all the mysteries of the Rosary from start to finish: Joyful, Sorrowful, Glorious, and Luminous! Why would someone as busy as the Pope spend so much time on the Rosary?

Perhaps it’s because the Rosary is such a wonderful way to spend time with the Lord. When we pray the Rosary, we mediate on the mysteries of the life of Christ. Like Mary, we store in our hearts the memory of the great events in the Lord’s life by which he revealed the Father’s love and accomplished our salvation. As we address Mary, we seek her prayers, asking her to lead us to Jesus so that we may know her Son more intimately, so that our hearts may be formed in accordance with his heart, which we sometimes refer to as “a burning furnace of charity”. And as we call upon Mary whilst reflecting on the events of Christ’s life, we are, as St. John Paul II reminded us, seeing Christ through the eyes of Mary.

The Rosary, therefore, is how we can spend time with Jesus, absorb the lessons of discipleship and truly make them our own, deepen our relationship with Jesus by calling upon his Mother, and find the wisdom and love we need to go forth, with hearts aflame with love for Christ, to bear witness to the Gospel... whether our words and example are welcome or unwelcome. Indeed, the Rosary is a school of prayer and a school of discipleship in miniature. It’s the best way you and I can spend fifteen or twenty minutes!

As you know, we are marking the 100th anniversary of the apparitions in Fatima, and

in fact, this evening at the Basilica of the Assumption in Baltimore, we begin a week-long Rosary Congress commemorating this great anniversary. Think about the year when Mary appeared to the three young children: 1917. World War I was raging in Europe and beyond and Our Lady warned against a growing specter of godlessness in society and of the dangers of another, greater World War, which indeed came to pass. Mary appeared to children, to the child-like, those simple and pure of heart, and through them helped the whole Church to draw close to the mystery of Christ and thus to read the signs of the time in the light of Christ.

Even as the charity of Christ burns brightly in our hearts, we recognize that we are called to evangelize in a very challenged situation. Can we not recognize in 2017 signs and portents even more frightening than those of 1917? As we see the threat of nuclear war rearing its ugly head, nations divided against nations, fellow citizens against fellow citizens, acts of terror, the mass shootings in Las Vegas, so many people on drugs, so many immigrants left adrift, so many of the unborn and the elderly at risk, so many people marginalized, so many families in disarray... As we see all this, do we not also see the need to respond to Our Lady's invitation and thus make it a habit to pray the Rosary every day?

Let us not underestimate the power of this prayer that, through Mary's intercession, brings us to the heart of salvation history, and helps open our hearts to the power of the Spirit, just as Mary's was.

If we would be true disciples of the Lord who are salt and light for a world that is challenged on every side, then let us draw close to Christ through the Holy Rosary, confident that Mary our Mother wants nothing more than that we would be authentically holy disciples of her Son. In this way, the light of Christ will shine brightly in us and enable the Church in a darkened world to be light brightly visible.

May God bless you and keep you always in his love!