

Archbishop Lori's Homily - 3rd Sunday of Lent; Mass for Baltimore Police Force

Mass for Baltimore Police Force

St. Casimir Parish

Baltimore, MD

Mar. 4, 2018

Dear friends, Let me once again warmly welcome the Mayor, the Police Commissioner, and so many of you who serve the City of Baltimore as members of the police force. Thank you for your service to our community! Every day you put your lives on the line to keep the citizens of our City safe and strive to build bonds of trust between the police and the community. Every day you strive to strengthen your efforts on behalf of us all as you implement necessary reforms and see to it that your ranks are filled with men and women who are worthy of this high calling. It's my opinion that, as a community, we don't pause nearly often enough to thank you for the demanding and difficult work you do to create a safe and peaceful Baltimore for all its citizens. . . so first of all we thank you!

This Mass is also an occasion to pray for you and for your work. I don't know about you, but when someone says to me, "Archbishop, I'm praying for you!" - that very fact gives me comfort and courage in my ministry. The fact that we've gathered together as a community of faith to pray with you and to pray for you is meant to be a source of comfort and encouragement to you and to your colleagues. So may the Lord bless you in your work which is more than a job but indeed a calling!

And there's a third reason why we are here - namely, so that the Word of God in Scripture may shed divine light on the work you have been called to do in our midst. God's Word offers you and indeed all of us, direction for our daily life and work and encouragement to follow the path of truth, virtue, and goodness.

And let us begin with the first reading from Book of Exodus. As you know, this book

of the Bible recounts the escape of the people of Israel from the slavery and forced labor of the land of Egypt. While in the desert, the Lord revealed himself to the people through Moses so as to form them into a people, a nation, that was especially his own. Interestingly, this was to be “a nation of laws not men,” as John Adams would say, a nation guided by the Law of God, the Ten Commandments. Three of the Commandments, as we know, pertain to our relationship with God and seven pertain to our relationship with our neighbors.

God’s Commandments are not unreasonable. The LORD did not command his people do outlandish things; rather, through the Commandments he guided them to discover his law already written in their hearts, that innate sense of right and wrong, that inner voice which tells us to choose good and shun evil. God’s Commandments are in fact eminently reasonable, for when we reflect on them, we realize they are for our own good and the good for society as a whole. What’s more, the people of Israel received God’s law as a great gift, a manifestation of his wisdom and a sign of his favor towards them. That is why Moses said to the people: “ . . . what great nation has statutes and ordinances that are as just as this whole law which I am setting before you today?” (Deut. 4:8).

The Commandments are the basis not only for Israel’s law but indeed for systems of law in many nations. As a rule, just laws enacted by civil authority relate in some way to one or more of the Ten Commandments. And if every citizen observed most of the Ten Commandments most of the time our society would be much more just and peaceful than it is. Those of you involved in law enforcement can attest to that!

But, of course, it is not that simple. The people of the Ancient Covenant did not always observe God’s Commandments, even though God revealed his Law to them amid signs and wonders. Nor do people in our day always abide by *human* laws, however reasonable and just they may be. We know this fact about human nature from reading crime stats and dealing with various kinds of criminal offenses. But we also know this by looking into our own hearts, mine included, hearts that, alas, are prone to choose evil instead of good: hearts that are capable of intrigue, treachery, and even violence; hearts that are capable of corrupting even the good we’ve been called to do. Jesus knew this better than we do. He knew that many came to believe in him, not because they took his words to heart, but rather because they

were enamored by his miracles. Today's Gospel reading tells us that "Jesus would not trust himself to them . . . because he knew them all . . . and did not need any one to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well" . . . *as indeed, he understands us*. For Jesus is God's Son in the flesh, and so he sees us as God sees us. He does not judge by appearances but rather his gaze penetrates to our hearts. Our Savior knows we are made for communion with God and one another but he also understands how flawed and fickle we can be; how capable we are of renouncing our human dignity and worth in exchange for money, pleasure, or power.

Clearly, enacting just laws is not enough. Nor is it enough to cajole and even force people to be law abiding, as important and necessary as that can be for the sake of public safety. Something more is needed and it's this: all of us, myself included, need to have the *temple of our hearts* cleansed. Just as Jesus cleansed the Temple in Jerusalem, so too he wants to cleanse and reform our hearts. For just as the humanity of the Son of God was the true Temple of God's Presence in the world, so too you and I, and those we serve, are temples of the Holy Spirit. How necessary, then, that we turn to Christ, 'the power and wisdom of God', asking him to send the Holy Spirit into our hearts to change us inwardly, so that we have the inner vision and virtue to walk in the ways of truth and love . . . to obey God's law not because of external pressure but rather as a free and loving response to his immense and merciful love. This is what we are called to do as leaders and as citizens. And this is what we must try to engender among family, friends, and colleagues, especially by the witness of our lives both on and off the job. Let us never underestimate the power of good example. Let us never discount the importance of role models, especially for our young people.

So let me conclude where I began with deep appreciation for your leadership and service to your fellow citizens as members of law enforcement in the City of Baltimore. May God keep you safe, preserve you from all harm, and guide your decisions day by day. Through the intercession of St. Michael the Archangel, the heavenly patron of police officers everywhere, may God give you the strength, wisdom, and virtue needed to fulfill your demanding responsibilities on behalf of us all.

God bless you and keep you always in his love!

*Read the Catholic Review's coverage of the Blue Mass **here**.*