

Archbishop Lori's Homily - Saturday 2nd Week of Lent; Mass for Consecrated Life

Mass for Consecrated Life

Immaculate Heart of Mary

Baynesville, MD

Mar. 3, 2018

In the altar of my private chapel are relics of the saints of Baltimore and those who have an association with the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Chief among them are St. Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton, the founder of the Daughters of Charity in Emmitsburg, known for their works of education, healthcare, and charity in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul.

When I think of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, I also think of the Servant of God, Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange who educated young women of color at a time when slavery was still the law of the land and went on to found the Oblate Sisters of Providence whose works of education, charity, and social justice still enliven us.

Next is St. John Neumann, the great Redemptorist priest and pastor who was ordained a bishop at St. Alphonsus in downtown Baltimore and who many times visited Archbishop Kenrick in the historic residence where I am privileged to live. What a holy and gentle soul, a great pastor, a missionary in the spirit of St. Alphonsus Ligouri, and a very effective bishop.

Along with St. John Neumann, we naturally think of Blessed Francis Seelos, St. John Neumann's successor as Pastor of St. Alphonsus. Blessed Francis Seelos' confessional is still in use but few have used it as efficaciously as he. So great a confessor was he that lines stretched around the block as people waited patiently for him to hear their confession.

When I think of the saints of Baltimore as I pray or offer Mass in my chapel, I

recognize that they are all members of religious institutes. It is men and women in consecrated life who form a true foundation of the local church – which does not consist of historic properties or other kinds of assets but rather a spirit of holiness that knows how to live in this passing world with one's gaze fixed on the world that is to come. These are the people capable of amazing the world by their transfigured lives; these are the people who unleash the power of the Gospel in our midst and help the Church to produce the lasting good fruit of the Gospel.

Along with the saints of Baltimore, we celebrate today the feast of St. Katharine Drexel, an heiress who belonged to a wealthy Philadelphia family that was, nonetheless, dedicated to the service of the poor and under-served, most specially Native Americans and African Americans. Thus, Katharine set her sights not on earthly prestige or money but rather on authentic treasure in heaven. She founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament who, to this day, are dedicated to serving Native Americans and African-Americans.

During her extraordinarily long life, St. Katharine Drexel drew her inspiration and strength not from the resources that were at her disposal but rather from her life of prayer, especially her devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. It was her long hours of adoration that strengthened her for a life of service to those who were at the margins of society. Long before Pope Francis spoke of our need to go to the peripheries, Mother Katharine and her sisters were there – bringing the light of the Gospel and the love of Jesus to those who often were forgotten and rejected by society, often the victims of the rankest type of racism. St. Katharine Drexel is not precisely a Baltimore saint but she surely pulls in the same direction as those saints whom our Nation's "Premier See" is proud to call our own.

And what direction did all these saints who continue to inspire us by their example and pray for us in heaven – what direction did all these saints point to and in what direction do they lead us? I think the answer can be found in Micah's proclamation of mercy but especially today's Gospel, the beautiful parable of the Prodigal Son. This parable, appearing only in Luke's Gospel, is a most beloved story of mercy. The son is prodigal – reckless – in spending, indeed, wasting his father's fortune only to come to his senses when his inheritance was gone and he was in penury. But the father was equally prodigal – reckless if you were to ask the older brother – in the

mercy that he was all-too-ready to offer to his errant son should he return. Return he did and with great rejoicing as the father not only forgave his son but gave him back his squandered dignity and clasped him to his bosom. Here we have from the lips of our Master a masterpiece of mercy as Jesus portrays what his Father and our Father – the Father of Mercies – is like, even as through the figure of the older brother he encourages us to be as prodigal as possible in extending the mercy we have received from others.

This, more than anything else is what the great saints have done – the saints whom we are proud to claim as our own in this country – the saints you are proud to claim as members of your own institutes. Yes, some were great theologians, others were heroic in martyrdom, still others great educators, missionaries par excellence, and administrators . . . but all of them, I'll wager, were recipients of God's abundant mercy and in turn they were lavish ministers of mercy . . . prodigal in their mercy toward immigrants, the sick, the vulnerable and the errant, prodigal in their mercy toward the poor, the enslaved, and the disadvantaged, prodigal in their love and care for those who are addicted and imprisoned. Their lives were a living proclamation of the Gospel of Mercy!

This morning I want to thank you for being prodigal in your love for this local church and for its young people, its poor, its needy, and its vulnerable. I thank you for the missions of mercy which you continue to sustain all around us – educating the poor, ministering to the sick and the dying, sheltering the homeless, feeding the hungry, witnessing to authentic justice . . . I could go on and on and never get close to describing all that you do. You are utterly generous in your ministry, you have been such for many years, and on behalf of all of us who make up this local church I truly thank you.

Like the saints of Baltimore and like St. Katharine Drexel, you, our jubilarians, have set your sights not on earthly power, money, pleasure, or success – but rather on the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of Mercy, which Jesus came to inaugurate in our midst. Your life of poverty, chastity, and obedience bears striking witness to the Risen Lord and helps us all to entrust our lives to him and to await his coming united in faith, hope, and charity.

As we celebrate this day dedicated to those in consecrated life, you, our jubilarians, bear witness to the longevity of love, the endless power of mercy, the enduring joy that comes from entrusting one's whole life to Christ our God. Congratulations! Warmest thanks! And may God bless us and keep us always in his love!