

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Rosary Congress Opening Mass

Rosary Congress Opening Mass

Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

October 7, 2017

Dear friends, this evening we begin what is called a Rosary Congress, a week-long event celebrated in parish churches in various parts of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. It is a time of prayer and reflection, meant to rekindle our devotion to the Blessed Mother through the daily recitation of the Rosary, a beautiful, time-tested prayer in which we “see Christ through the eyes of Mary.” (JP II).

This Rosary Congress was proposed as a way of observing the 100th anniversary of the Blessed Virgin Mary's miraculous appearances to three young children—Francisco, Jacinta, and Lucia—at Fatima, in Portugal. When, through these children, Mary delivered messages of repentance, hope, and peace, the world of 1917 was in the grip of global war and there were ominous signs that the 20th Century would turn out to be the most violent in human history. During the week ahead, the Rosary Congress will be a vehicle enabling us in *these* perilous times to focus on the message of Fatima - in which the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, calls us, in our day, to do penance for our own sins and the sins of others, to deepen our life of daily prayer - prayer for ourselves, the Church, and for the peace of the world torn asunder by senseless violence.

Tonight, this opening Mass of the Rosary Congress focuses on the universal call to holiness embedded in the messages of Fatima, a calling we have all received through Baptism, but also a calling that is epitomized through the witness of religious men and women. As a rule, religious sisters, brothers, and priests live in communities of prayer, dedicate themselves to God by vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, and serve the poor, the sick, the aged, and young people. These men and women religious show us how to live in this passing world with our hearts set on the world that is to come. They have embraced this demanding vocation, not just for their sake

but ours, and so this evening we gratefully entrust them to the prayers of Mary, asking that they might lead lives of exemplary holiness –thereby helping us also to lead lives of goodness and holiness.

In fact, this evening's Scripture readings challenge to ask ourselves if, as members of the Church, we are living so as to produce in our lives the good fruit of the Gospel, an abundance of holiness. Let us see what these readings have to say to us and then touch briefly on how the Rosary helps us to attain genuine holiness.

As you recall, both the reading from Isaiah and Matthew's Gospel speak of a vineyard. The vineyard, namely, the People of Israel, was planted by God himself who is identified as its owner and cultivator. In both readings we note that God carefully planted his vineyard. He put a hedge around it for protection, dug a wine press, and built a tower. In other words, God gave to his people what they needed to produce a harvest of truth, honor, integrity, purity, love, and graciousness – in other words, a harvest of that excellence we call virtue.

But what happened? Those who were in charge of the vineyard and those who worked in it produced instead a most disappointing harvest. Isaiah describes it as a harvest of "wild grapes" while in the Gospel, the tenants withheld the harvest from the landowner. They went so far as to reject the messengers the owner sent, namely, and eventually rejecting even his son. What Jesus is describing in this part of the parable are the prophets God sent who often faced persecution and rejection because their message was unpopular. The son who was rejected by the tenants is himself, for Jesus was rejected by the chief priests and the leaders of the people.

But let us read this parable not as judgment on others but rather on ourselves. For, in the fullness of time, God has planted a new vineyard that we call the Church. He endowed that vineyard, the Church, with everything necessary so that you and I could yield a harvest of holiness – namely – the Word of God, the Mass, the Sacraments, and so much more. Further, God has sent amazing messengers to his Church – the Blessed Virgin Mary, and then Apostles, martyrs, holy priests and religious. (One thinks, e.g., of St. Teresa of Avila or in our own times St. Teresa of Calcutta). Above all, God the Father, in the fullness of time, sent us his only Begotten Son who assumed our humanity, preached the Good News and died on the

Cross so that we might live forever in the Kingdom of Heaven. See how carefully, how lovingly the Father planted & tends his vineyard, the Church!

So, let us ask ourselves: have we really given God the only harvest that he seeks? Namely, a harvest of holiness, our graced response to the outpouring of God's love whereby we God above all things and by loving our neighbor as ourselves? Or, have we instead, turned away from the example of the holy ones he sent us, even we implicitly rejecting his only Son by taking the faith he taught us and remaking it to suit ourselves? Have we made our religion merely an alternative path to self-fulfillment? Do we stay with our faith only when it meets our emotional needs or remain only when the faith operates exactly as we think it should? Or do we rebel when we are challenged to think differently and live differently, and sometimes forget that we are not the owners of the Church... Rather, the Church belongs to the Lord - it is his new creation by Water and the Word!

In the midst of such soul-searching, let us not give in to discouragement. Rather, as St. Paul urges, let us lay aside anxiety and let us seek 'the peace that surpasses all understanding.' In other words, let us surrender the turmoil we experience when we try to live life on our own terms rather than God's... For it is by living on God's terms, not ours, that we produce the desired harvest - peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, beyond our imagining . . . but how to achieve it?

So, let me suggest a simple way to become fruitful members of the Church - namely, to pray the Rosary daily, and to pray it thoughtfully and reflectively. For when we pray the Rosary, we meditate on the mysteries of Christ, the events in his life that reveal the Father's love and bring about our redemption. In the Rosary, we call upon Mary who leads us to her Son Jesus and with the help of her prayers we store up in our hearts all that the Lord Jesus did to reveal the Father's love and to accomplish our salvation. If we spend fifteen or twenty minutes a day praying the Rosary, maybe in the car on the way to work or before retiring at night or, better yet, praying the Rosary together as a family - if we do this, friends, we'll find it makes a world of difference in our lives! It is not for nothing that many religious habits - for example that of the Dominicans and Franciscans - includes a Rosary. Religious women and men know it is a powerful path to holiness but it's a path accessible to us all!

Dear friends, inspired by the religious for whom we pray tonight and confident in the intercession of Mary, the Mother of the Church, may we in our time make the Church fruitful by reflecting in our lives the holiness of Christ to the glory of God the Father. May God bless us and keep us always in his love!