

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Saturday of the 28th Week of Ordinary Time; Knights of Columbus Board Meeting

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Votive Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Knights of Columbus Board Meeting

Phoenix, Arizona

October 21, 2017

As a newly ordained priest, I asked a seasoned pastor for tips on preaching. A jovial man without a pretentious bone in his body, he said, "Bill, it's like flying an airplane. I look at the readings and decide which direction to take off in, and while I'm up there I ask the Holy Spirit to bring me in for a safe landing."

Still fresh from my seminary studies, I responded, "Oh, so you look for a '*dabitur vobis*' moment?" In that instant I could see this pastor was happy that I was *not* his assistant pastor!

Well, today's Gospel is where the phrase '*dabitur vobis*' comes from. It is a Latin phrase that means, 'it will be given to you' and it been misused over time by many unprepared preachers who go into the pulpit hoping for a sudden inspiration from the Holy Spirit. I don't think this is what Jesus meant when he told his disciples 'not to worry about what to say because it would be given to them by the Holy Spirit.'

What Jesus was really doing in this Gospel passage was getting his disciples ready for that moment of truth when they would be hauled before the authorities and lay their lives on the line for professing his Name. In that moment, he said, the Spirit would teach them what to say. When Jesus speaks those same words to us again this morning, he is preparing *us* for those moments of truth when we are called upon to bear witness to our faith, whether the setting is friendly or hostile.

So, this morning let's ask and try briefly to answer three questions – How serious is our obligation to bear witness to Jesus? What are some of these settings where have to give testimony to our faith? And how do we get ready for these moments of truth?

Well, we can deal quickly with the first question. Our obligation to bear witness to Jesus, especially when it is costly or inconvenient, is serious indeed. In fact, Jesus makes clear that if we acknowledge him before others, he in turn will acknowledge us before the angels of God. If we deny the Lord before others, he will deny us before the heavenly court. And we might say to ourselves, I can't imagine myself denying the Lord. Yet, how many Catholics are uncomfortable with being "too" Catholic? Are there times when a particular teaching or the faith itself is called into question that we demur, that we try to be diplomatic or change the subject, or try to build unsupportable bridges? Let me add that the obligation to bear witness does not belong only to those with special expertise or with a special position in the Church. Rather, it is something expected of all the baptized and it's critically important. The thought that Jesus would deny us before God's court should be daunting.

What about the settings where we are to bear witness to Jesus? As noted earlier, Jesus was preparing his disciples for martyrdom – that is, bearing witness to him at the cost of their lives. Thus, Jesus talked about their being brought before rulers and authorities – just as he would be brought before Herod and Pilate on the way to Calvary.

Throughout history, Christians have been brought before rulers who questioned them about their faith and consigned them to death. The testimony of these martyrs is eloquent indeed, more eloquent than that of any wordsmith. In our day, many are summarily executed for their faith. They have no opportunity to utter a word but their testimony to the Lord is eloquent in the shedding of their blood.

What of us who are not hauled before magistrates or firing squads? Where, then, are we to give testimony to Jesus? The answer is . . . everywhere. Sometimes at the dinner table with our children and grandchildren. Sometimes with co-workers and friends. Maybe it's a dinner party where the Church comes under attack. Maybe it's with co-workers or friends who are looking for answers. Sometimes we need to bear

witness at the intersection of Church and State. My gentle Mom who doesn't think of herself as a theologian was never shy when it came to speaking up for the faith. Once a group of Jehovah's Witnesses came to our door hoping to proselytize. They met their match with Mom who invited them in, sat them down, offered them refreshments, and told them why she'll always be a Catholic. Mostly, though, she taught me to defend and foster the faith by trying to live it. In words attributed to St. Francis, "Preach always. When necessary use words."

How, then, do we get ready for these moments of truth in our daily lives when we are called upon to bear witness to Jesus and to our faith? Aren't we prepared to bear witness to Jesus just like the first disciples? Isn't a matter of being with Jesus, spending time with Jesus, listening to his words, absorbing his teaching, and opening our hearts more and more widely to his truth and love? We prepare to bear witness to Jesus by cultivating our hearts through prayer. As we pray, the Holy Spirit first given to us at Baptism comes alive in our hearts and begins to work in us and through us.

To be sure, we need to have a solid working knowledge of our faith and we need to be able to speak about the faith competently and insightfully. But bearing witness to Jesus, especially under duress, isn't merely a matter of knowledge, rhetorical skill, or professional competency. Nor does it mean that we have scaled the heights of sanctity. Rather, it means we are on our way, sincerely and humbly trying in God's grace to follow Jesus, to love him with all our hearts and to follow the way of life he taught us. For that reason the Church favors an array of spiritual avenues that help ordinary Christians to grow in holiness – the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, the Little Way of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Introduction to the Devout Life* by St. Francis de Sales, the everyday spirituality of St. Josemaría Escrivá, and much more.

As we grow in prayer and holiness, something truly wonderful happens. We become those servants who are at once clever and wise who know when to speak, what to say, and how to say it – in ways that will enable the Lord's message to be heard. We're not debating others or trying to force our opinion on others. Rather we find ourselves speaking with the persuasive force of God's love, the "logic" of love, if you will, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. When that happens, let us not be surprised. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would teach us what say. So too we

are helped by Mary, the Star of Evangelization, who prays with us & for us. May God bless us and keep us always in his love.