

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Solemnity of Christ the King

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Mass of Thanksgiving for the Beatification of Solanus Casey

St. Ambrose Parish

November 26, 2017

On this feast of Christ the King, let me begin with a very “un-king-like” figure. His name was Solanus Casey and, like Fr. Paul, he was a Franciscan priest, a Capuchin Friar.

I’m told that all Franciscan Friars are good and humble men but when it came to being good and humble Fr. Solanus was the best. But his path to the priesthood and to religious life wasn’t easy. Born in Wisconsin in 1870, he was given the baptismal name of Bernard Francis but mostly he was called “Barney”. He grew up on the farms where he his father worked but moving from place to place it became clear that young Barney was not a star student. So he dropped out of school and went to work. He was a lumberjack, a hospital orderly, and street car conductor and prison guard. In prison he witnessed a brutal murder and that experience changed his life. Deep down he had always desired to be a priest but for him the only path to the priesthood was to find a religious order that would accept him. In God’s Providence he found his way to Detroit where he entered the Capuchins and was given the religious name of “Solanus”. To be sure, he struggled with his studies and barely made it to ordination and even then was not allowed to preach, at least at first, nor was he given any major responsibility in the Capuchin Order. After a few assignments, he was sent to St. Bonaventure Monastery in Detroit and for many years he was the porter, the doorman, at the monastery.

Many would have felt humiliated to have such a lowly job, but not Fr. Solanus. He was a man of joy who played the violin and told Irish stories. Deeply in love with the Lord, he was kind to every person he met. Every person with whom he spoke mattered to him. So people began to tell Fr. Solanus what was going on in their lives and he would pray with them and for them. He was soon conducting services for the

sick and many of those for whom Fr. Solanus prayed were cured of their spiritual, psychological, and physical illnesses.

Solanus was deeply devoted to Jesus truly present in the Eucharist and the more intensely he prayed to Jesus the more he became like Jesus – Fr. Solanus became poor in spirit, meek, humble, and clean of heart, a man who hungered for holiness, and a priest who knew suffering in his own life. In a word, Fr. Solanus loved like Jesus loved and extended to the suffering the healing touch of Jesus. Those who met this humble friar never forgot him and on Saturday, November 18th of this year he was beatified before some 70,000 people at Ford Stadium in Detroit. How true indeed are the Lord's words: "Those who exalt themselves shall be humbled and those who humble themselves shall be exalted."

Solanus is on the path to becoming a saint, indeed, he reigns in heaven, because he was like Jesus; he was like Christ our King. Yet, Jesus is unlike any earthly King. He is not like earthly rulers who are proud of their power, who tout their accomplishments and put down their enemies. Jesus showed us another kind of power – the power of love, a love that overcomes evil with goodness.

Think of how Christ our King came into the world. From all eternity he was God's only Son in the splendor of heaven. But out of love for the world, God the Father sent us his Son to save us, not by issuing a decree or a law . . . instead he came in person. He took on our humanity and was born of the Virgin Mary in the poverty of a crude stable, "no crib for a bed". Yet, this helpless and poor child is the Lord of lords and the King of kings, who came into the world to preach the Good News and save us from our sins. And throughout his life, Jesus reached out to sinners, the poor, and dispossessed, to the sick and dying, to the grieving, to those who were searching. The Lord not only preached love of God and love of neighbor, he taught us how to love and shared his love with us and for us by laying down his life for us on the Cross. And in the power of God's love he conquered sin and death. Kings command armies and political leaders have the power of the purse but only Christ our King has the power to forgive our sins and lift us up out of our poverty so as to give us new and everlasting life.

On this last Sunday of the Church's Year, the Church invites you and me to look

upon Jesus, upon Christ our King, the King of Truth and Life, the King of Holiness and Grace, the King of Justice, Love, and Peace. As we draw near to Jesus and to one another, don't we have a desire deep down in our hearts to be like Jesus? Don't we want to be a part of Jesus' Kingdom? Don't we want to reign with Jesus, just as Bl. Solanus Casey reigns with Jesus?

But what does it mean to reign with Jesus? It means to live and love like Jesus while we are still here on earth. This is the message of our Gospel today. In his love, Jesus has identified with the poor -with those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, imprisoned -with those whom the world has tried to put out of their sight. It was to these first and foremost that Jesus came into the world and to the extent that we love and serve those in need we are serving Jesus and when we are serving Jesus we are reigning with him. That's what Fr. Solanus did from his humble post as a doorman in a monastery and that's what you and I can do wherever we live and whatever we do -we can love and serve those who are in need.

If we really want to understand and live this Gospel reading, let's hear to the words of another modern-day saint, Mother Teresa of Calcutta: "Christ said, 'I was hungry and you gave me food.' He was hungry not only for bread but for the understanding love of being loved, of being known of being someone to someone. He was naked not only of clothing but of human dignity and of respect, through the injustice that is done to the poor, who are looked down upon simply because they are poor. He was dispossessed not only of a house made of bricks but because of the deprivation of those who are locked up, of those who are unwanted and unloved, of those who walk through the world with no one to care for them. Do we go out to meet them? Do we know them? Do we try to find them?"

It is in finding Jesus in the poor and in loving Jesus in the poor that we truly reign with Jesus, the King who is Poor in Spirit, Meek and Humble of Heart, the King who is chaste and singlehearted, the King who hungers for righteousness, the King who has made our peace.

Just imagine if more people in this city of Baltimore reigned with Jesus! Just imagine if more hearts and minds and lives were changed because they were won over to the reign of Christ! That's when the murders will stop. That's when neighborhoods will

rejuvenate. That's when families will get back together and young people will grow up in safety and security. Let us not think of this as a dream unattainable in our generation but rather a challenge to be met in God's grace, one conversion at a time. Just as Fr. Solanus bore witness to Jesus, so too he sends us forth to bear witness to his love every day - where we live and work and pray and socialize - for if Jesus lives in us and if we love like Jesus then we can say, even in the most dire of circumstances, that the Kingdom of God is in our midst!

Praised be Christ our King!