

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Votive Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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The Book of Tobit in the Old Testament tells the story of a just man who lived some seven or eight centuries before the birth of Christ. He was a member of one of the Northern tribes of Israel that were deported to Assyria. Tobit made his home as an exile in Nineveh, a city made famous by the preaching of Jonah. Among his fellow exiles, he stood out as a model of fidelity.

Although Tobit apparently prospered in his exile, he also endured a lot. When, in his charity, he buried a man who had murdered, he was ridiculed. "Importuned" by birds perched on the garden wall, Tobit experienced blindness and was subsequently chided by his wife for his lack of charity. Tobit also had a son named Tobias who decided to marry a woman married seven times previously; all seven of her previous husbands died on their wedding night... nothing to worry about there! Thankfully, though, Tobias lived for another day.

Arguably, then, things could have been going better for Tobit and Tobias when a mysterious figure named Raphael insinuated himself into their lives. A sort of fellow traveler, Raphael cured Tobit of his blindness and then opened his eyes of faith to the meaning of genuine righteousness, especially the value God places on almsgiving, on generosity to the poor. Tobit and Tobias had no idea who Raphael really was; they seemed to think he was somehow in their employ. But Raphael was an angel, an angel of healing sent by Lord. Encountering Raphael, this messenger of God, Tobit and Tobias truly encountered the Lord, the God of healing, mercy, and love.

Tobit and Tobias, of course, were not the only ones visited by an angel. The most consequential of angelic visits was to a humble maiden in Nazareth. This time it was not Raphael who visited but rather the Archangel Gabriel. He delivered the message

that Mary was to be the Mother of the Messiah, whose name would be Jesus, because he would save the people from their sins.

In delivering this message, Gabriel would ask Mary, the virgin of Nazareth not merely to give alms, as Raphael had asked of Tobit, but rather, to commit the whole of her existence to the will of God to save the world. Mary's response to this stunning request remains the byword for every disciple: "Let it be done to me according to your word." In making a gift of herself, Mary opened the way for the Father to give us his Son, and for the Son, the child of her womb, to lay down his life for us in love. As St. Bernard of Clairvaux would proclaim in the 12th century, when the soldiers pieced the side of Christ with a lance, it was as if a purse full of treasure had been burst open, a purse containing the price of our salvation. This is God's idea of almsgiving – his idea of generosity to us, the poor: He gave us his only Son, so much did he love us!

As Mary's Son, Jesus, went about preaching the Good News, humanity was visited no longer by an angel but by the very Son of God. Moreover, he who was Son of God and Son of Mary judged not by appearances but rather by according to the standards of God's justice, love, and mercy. That is why, in today's Gospel, Jesus teaches that the widow's mite, her donation of a few pennies, given with a loving heart out of her very real poverty, was worth more than the donations of those gave only from their surplus wealth.

In this way the Son of God showed us how God the Father loves the world. For the Father gave not from his excess; no, he sent his only Son – he gave his all. So too, in teaching us the value of the widow's mite, the Son of Man reflected the total and single-hearted love of his mother who gave all that she had to cooperate with God's plan for the world's salvation.

What possibly could all this mean for us? The trials and tribulations of Tobit and his family seem quaint and far removed from our experience –yet upon closer inspection, can we not recognize in this ancient family the very real problems and struggles that our families experience? Ridicule for doing the right thing; illness; disagreements with one's spouse; the challenges young people face in finding the right person to marry. So too, while Mary's vocation is utterly unique – to be the

Mother of God -are there not also times in our lives when we are asked to lay everything on the line? Think of any occasion when you, as married couples, have had to love heroically. When a priest tells me, "I wasn't ordained to do this or that", I sometimes respond that my parents didn't get married with the thought that one of their children, my brother Francis, would suffer from intellectual disabilities -but once that happened, their response of love deepened in ways they probably could not have imagined on their wedding day.

So, let us ask this question: In the drama of our lives, are we visited by angels, like Tobit, Tobias, and Mary? No, dear friends, something much greater than that. We are visited by the One who is King of kings and Lord of lords, by the Eucharistic Lord, the very One who laid down his life for us. Of the fullness of his love we have all received, grace following upon grace. He whose blood is the price of our salvation - he it is that draws near to us, especially in times of turmoil, confusion, and suffering.

How, then, can we respond? Simply by opening our hearts to the Lord, as Mary did: "Let be done to me as you say!" Once we make her words our own, then we are set free to give God praise by entering into the Lord's own gift of self. And by replicating that gift of self as we embrace the principle of charity. Thus in our need do we give of ourselves to others who are in need -all that we are and all that we have -not to glorify ourselves but to glorify the Lord by serving others ...just as Father McGivney has taught us!

Vivat Jesus!