

Catechists' Convocation

Introduction

We've gathered as servants of God's Word, as evangelizers and catechists, on the feast of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Abbot and Doctor of the Church. This great preacher, evangelizer, and teacher of the faith spread the Word of God far and wide and opened the hearts of many individuals and communities to the truth of Christ's love.

The oration for the feast describes the Abbot St. Bernard 'as a man consumed with zeal for God's house and as a light shining and burning in the Church.' In that same prayer, we ask God to grant us the grace to be on fire with the same spirit that animated St. Bernard and to walk always as children of light.

St. Bernard has a lot of wisdom to offer us this evening and we do well to ask him for the grace to accept that wisdom in our personal lives and in our role as evangelizers and catechists.

What Bernard Says To Us

But we may have questions, even objections. We might say that St. Bernard lived a long time ago and indeed he did. He was born in Dijon, France in 1096 and after an eventful life died in 1153. And while his times were very different from our own, we shouldn't forget that Bernard lived through a tumultuous period. He faced many controversies regarding the teaching of the faith and was called upon to reform monastic life in his day. This he did with a wisdom that flowed from his love for the Lord and for His Mother. As we face the challenges and difficulties of our time, St. Bernard teaches us that we too must seek that wisdom which we attain only by close personal intimacy with the Lord through a life of daily prayer, through reading Scripture, and by drinking deeply of the Church's sacramental life.

Then too, it might be said that St. Bernard was an abbot; he was not only a religious but a leader in monastic life, a life very different from that of the priests, religious, and laity represented here this evening. Yet St. Bernard's style of monastic life has much to say to us. After nearly 1,000 years, St. Bernard's homilies remain fresh and vivid, and why? I think it's because he comprehended the Scriptures so deeply

through contemplative prayer and a life of simplicity and self-denial. We are not necessarily called to embrace monastic life but we cannot be effective evangelizers and catechists unless we learn to read Scripture prayerfully and allow it to pervade us – body, mind, and spirit – such that Christ speaks to us on every page and comes to life in our minds & hearts. Simplicity and self-denial appropriate to our way of life helps open us to the Lord.

Then again, St. Bernard was a powerful preacher. He preached 86 homilies on the Song of Songs & also preached the Second Crusade. We may not be called upon to preach 86 homilies on anything but our whole lives should indeed be a living testimony to the love of Christ poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, to that love which shapes us into the image of the Christ of the Beatitudes. Only then can we preach the greatest mission of all times – the coming of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of truth and life; holiness and grace; justice, love, and peace! This is what it means to be an evangelizer.

Words of Advice from Pope Francis

We are all very close to Pope Francis in these days when he has suffered the loss and injury of his close relatives in Argentina. We are close to him for another reason. He constantly reminds us that in our role of serving and spreading God's Word, 'Jesus knows us, that Jesus loves us, that Jesus forgives us, shares our difficulties with us and supports us with his grace.' He also challenges us with a father's love – that to speak to others about Jesus, we need to know and love him, experience him in prayer, in listening to his Word and receive Him in the Eucharist.'

Blessed Virgin Mary

So too in our role as evangelizers and catechists we need to have a warm devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. What a beautiful relationship of love St. Bernard had with Mary and how often Pope Francis calls upon Mary as the exemplar and intercessor of the Church's mission of evangelization.

This evening I sincerely thank our honorees and indeed all of you for your dedication, fidelity, perseverance, and love – for all that you do to advance the Church's mission all the time. You are the great unsung heroes of the Church! Through the prayers of St. Bernard and Blessed Virgin Mary may your ministries

bear abundant and lasting fruit in the weeks and months ahead!