

Feast of St. Albert the Great

Introduction

During the presentation of Mount seminarians to the University Board of Trustees I became distressed when the seminarians opined that weekday homilies should run no more than three minutes and that Sunday homilies should run no more than eight minutes, barely time enough to cook scrambled eggs. I hope you will understand that it is humanly impossible for any bishop to preach only for three minutes after *Ecce Sacerdos Magnus* has been sung.

Dear brothers, today's Feast, St. Albert the Great, and today's readings suggest three points regarding religious freedom which might help us put the day ahead in context; let's get right to them.

Lover of Reason

The first point is St. Albert the Great's love and respect for the capacity of reason to arrive at truth. He had one of the most capacious minds of the high middle ages; among other things, he engaged in pioneering studies of the natural sciences derived mainly from his study of Aristotle.

St. Albert's respect for the capacity of reason to arrive at truth helps us in our desire to foster and defend religious freedom, for without truth there is no freedom. If reason can only produce opinions, we can be sure that it's the opinion of the rich and powerful that will prevail; the rights and freedoms of those who are neither rich nor powerful will be trampled. Freedom requires us to acknowledge certain fixed truths about the way things are and about human nature itself. Only then is our society prepared to defend human dignity and truly respect the rights of the vulnerable. Living as often we do in a "dictatorship of relativism", we should asked the intercession of St. Albert the Great for a newfound respect for truth and human reason in our culture.

Co-Workers in the Truth

The second point reinforces the first. At the end of our first reading from the 3rd Letter of John we find the motto of Pope Benedict XVI: "...[b]e co-workers in the truth." It's not enough for us as individuals to grasp the truth about human life,

dignity, and freedom. If we are to foster and defend religious freedom, we have to win over many hearts and minds; but more than that, we have to convince them of the need to join forces in working for the preservation of religious freedom both at home and abroad.

This is easier said than done; many a priest will think twice about saying anything that sounds “political” from the pulpit. And research confirms that they have good reason to think twice. A major study done by a firm called “Right Brain Research” found that all but the most converted Catholics do not like to mix religion and politics. If it sounds like politics is coming from the pulpit, they tune it out.

This doesn’t mean we have to abandon engaging the culture. People aren’t content with mere pious platitudes, either. What it means is there is hard work to do in helping fellow Catholics get beyond the relativism of our culture and see the importance of truth in their own lives and in the lives of loved ones. We also have to introduce them to the bright light which faith sheds on human reason, dignity, freedom, and moral responsibility. If this is preached and taught on a regular basis, not just on an emergency basis, we have a chance of raising up a cadre of Catholics who know how to engage the culture, including the political process, in defense of human dignity, freedom, and the common good.

Prayer and Perseverance Third, in the Gospel, the unjust judge quite appropriately makes his appearance at the outset of our symposium on religious freedom. Fortunately, the judge meets his match in the persevering widow. You can just imagine how she wore down his resistance. None of us would like to be on the receiving end of the widow’s complaints but all of us admire the fact that she kept at it until she won through to victory.

We have to be like that in the struggle to defend religious freedom. We have to have the courage and pluck of the Little Sisters of the Poor. As you know they have filed a lawsuit against the HHS mandate. They won injunctive relief but I’d ask you to pray for them because the merits of their case will be heard in the 10th circuit on December 8th. I’m taking nothing for granted but I have to admit I like thinking about how uncomfortable it must be to be on the opposing side of the Little Sisters of the Poor. But let’s not underestimate how much courage it took for them and

many others to go to court to defend the freedom of conscience.

Anything that is truly valuable is worth fighting for and praying about. Religious liberty is worth fighting for. Human dignity and the common good of society hang in the balance. We don't win by shouting and by flailing our arms... but rather by being a persistent voice of faith and reason and by backing up our claims with service to the poor and needy coupled with an assiduous life of prayer. We need to avoid getting swept up in this struggle on the same terms as our secular opponents. It's not about the culture wars or partisanship but rather about the human capacity for truth and love. We best defend those capacities when we are fully engaged with the God of truth and love in prayer. When the One who will come to judge the living and dead hears us, then we will fear no human tribunal. May God bless us and keep us in his love.