

Holy Sepulchre - Homily at Vespers

Introduction

In homes all around us, families and children are celebrating Halloween. For weeks, our neighborhoods have been draped with cobwebs, carved pumpkins, and images of ghosts, goblins, and other scary looking characters. Tonight children, dressed in costume and carefully supervised, are trick or treating among their friends, neighbors, and family members.

But we are doing something a bit different. We are retrieving the original meaning of Halloween - by celebrating Vespers on the Eve of All Saints' Day. And in the course of this celebration, members of the Middle Atlantic Lieutenancy will receive promotions in rank. It is an evening for us reflect for on the call to holiness we have received and how our participation in the Order of the Holy Sepulchre helps us answer that call.

The Call to Holiness

The greatest promotion we can receive, of course, is to become a saint. People from every century, from every walk of life, the rich and poor, the old and the young, lay women and men, religious and the ordained... have all been proclaimed saints by the Church.

Through the centuries, the Order of the Holy Sepulchre has claimed many saints, beginning with St. Helen whose devotion to the true Cross is unparalleled; Pope Saint Pius X, Blessed Alfredo Cardinal Schuster; and Blessed Bartholomew Longo. And there are many others besides, both canonized and non-canonized. Furthermore, the daily prayer of the Order aims at holiness of life. Addressed to the Risen Lord Jesus, the font and source of all holiness, it invokes Mary and Joseph, Saints Peter and Paul, and all the saints, asking for the grace to bear witness to and defend the faith, to practice charity towards those in need, especially the poor and the sick, and to defend and support the Holy Land where Jesus preached and healed, died and rose, for us and for our salvation. Another prayer speaks of the Knights and Ladies of the Holy Sepulchre as "convinced and sincere ambassadors of peace and love" - not only in the conflicted Middle East but also here at home, in a culture that is increasingly polarized and secularized.

The Ordinary Measure

The Second Vatican Council set in sharp relief the Church's constant teaching on the universal call to holiness; this is what it said: "Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state - are called by the Lord to that perfection of sanctity by which the Father himself is perfect" (LG, 11).

St. John Paul II (who canonized more saints than any other pope in history) - referred to holiness as "the ordinary measure of the Christian life" ... "The Church," he said, "is profoundly holy and is called to live and manifest this holiness in each one of her members". We are called to live extraordinarily holy lives amid our ordinary activities, to live the Gospel with consistency in our daily lives: in the family, in work activity, and in all relationships and occupations.

So too Pope Francis urges us to holiness in his exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*. He reminds us that we are called to encounter Christ and to allow Christ to accompany us on our daily journey through life, just as he accompanied the disciples on the road to Emmaus. As he walked with them, Jesus opened their minds to the meaning of Scripture and then revealed himself to them in the Breaking of the Bread, the Eucharist. Once we have met Christ, dear friends, & fallen in love with him, everything changes; listening to his words of spirit and life, worshipping in spirit and truth, opening our hearts in prayer, we begin to live differently - we become his witnesses.

The Order of the Holy Sepulchre and the Call to Holiness

For centuries the Order of the Holy Sepulchre has borne witness to the holiness of the Risen Christ, to Jesus the Victor over sin and death. It has sought to keep alive the memory of Jesus not only by defending and supporting the holy places but also by supporting the presence and works of the Church in the Holy Land. Above all, by gathering to celebrate the Eucharist, the Order keeps remembers and shares in all the Lord said and did to save us.

We participate in Order's work in various way - especially through our prayers and generosity but also by going on pilgrimage to the holy places. But we also participate by the holiness of our lives which serves to attract others to Christ and to

the Gospel. We bear witness by how we live to the empty tomb, to Jesus, the Victor over sin and death.

So dear Knights and Ladies, on this evening that is graced by the company of saints in heaven, see in your promotions not only the grateful recognition of our beloved Order; see also in them a renewed call to ever greater holiness, to more assiduous prayer, to a deeper relationship with Christ and his Body, the Church, and to a warmer and ever more generous love of neighbor – For in this way, you help make holy the land we live in day in and day out and help all of us procure in God's grace the most coveted of all promotions: "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter the joy of your Lord!"

May God bless us and keep us always in His love.