

Mass in Honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Introduction: Beware of Honors

With apologies to St. Norbert, whose feast day it is, we have chosen to celebrate this morning a Saturday Mass in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and for two reasons: it is a first Saturday, a day of special devotion to the Blessed Mother associated with her apparitions at Fatima; secondly, the Order has always had great devotion to the Blessed Mother and indeed is under the patronage of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Here's the plan of attack: If you don't mind, I'll commend today's reading from the Book of Tobit to your future reflection at some point in the future and instead offer a few reflections on the Gospel which tie in with the importance of the Blessed Mother in our lives.

Beware of Honors

Yesterday, I drew parallels between your role as State Deputies and my role as a diocesan bishop and chaplain. Today's Gospel reading from St. Mark suggests a further parallel. We both have a place of honor in the Church and in the Order, the very thing Jesus warns against in today's Gospel. We have titles; we have distinctive signs of office; we sit at head tables; we lead prayers; and we are asked to make decisions that affect the lives of others. All in all, it seems, we're headed for perdition.

Jesus reserves some of his sternest words for those who use religion for their own gain and those who practice fake piety. This is truly is an occupational hazard for me and for the clergy. It is also something which we, as leaders of the Order, have to guard against. The blessing of the Jewels of Office that the Supreme Knight bestows on you as State Deputies includes an admonition not to lord your leadership over others or to use it for any sort of personal gain. Nor should we allow ourselves to enjoy the marks of honor that come our way or feel that we are personally entitled to them. For example, I should not ask my mother to call me "Your Excellency"!

The Widow's Mite

Let's spend a moment on Jesus' praise for the widow who could only contribute a few pennies to the temple treasury. In those days everyone threw coins into the treasury and the donations of those who gave more made an ostentatious clank while the widow's little gift barely registered a sound. As a result everyone noticed the gifts of wealthy but Jesus alone noticed and valued the gift of the poor widow. He told his disciples that she gave more than everyone else because the wealthy gave from their surplus but the widow from her poverty. She donated her meager living expenses; her gift was truly sacrificial.

Yesterday the Supreme Knight gave a report on the charitable giving of the members of the Order and the number of volunteer hours our members have donated. For the most part, these are many small contributions given with big hearts. They reflect the sacrificial love of the widow's gift. And what is true of the Order is also true of the wider Church. How important that we assess the value these gifts as Jesus did.

Tie-In with the Blessed Virgin Mary

What do these Gospel reflections have to do with Mary and our beloved Order? Echoing the Book of Judith in the Old Testament, we say of Mary, "You are the highest honor of our race" - that is - of all humanity. The angel addressed her as "full of grace" and "blessed among women." She is the Immaculate Conception, the Mother of God, the first disciple. She was assumed Body and Soul into heaven. God bestowed these honors and titles on her precisely because she is lowly, precisely because she understood her dependence on the greatness of God's love. In turn, Mary's gift to God was not in the form of copper coins but her very being: she gave herself totally to God and experienced more than any of us ever could the enormity of her Son's gift of self as hung upon the Cross. If we want to avoid the spiritual danger of taking our honors & titles too seriously, & instead place ourselves at the service of the Church, we need only turn to Mary. And let's not forget how the Blessed Mother at Guadalupe loved Juan Diego and enabled this man who had little or no standing in society to make a huge contribution to the evangelization of the Americas. Mary will also enable us to make a big contribution to the Church's mission.

Often, when I'm in New Haven, Stephen Feiler shuttles me over to the print shop

where there is a huge stash of Rosaries, which I am invited to bless for distribution within the Order. A Rosary is part of the standard operating equipment of every Knight and his family: not just a Rosary in the pocket but a Rosary in the hand. The Rosary is the Blessed Mother's way of putting us in touch with all that her Son did to bring about our salvation. It's her way of seeing to it that you and I become like Jesus.

A famous ad tells us that fifteen minutes could save us 15% on car insurance. Fifteen minutes a day is what it takes to say a Rosary. *That* could save us. Vivat Jesus!