

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time; Saints Lorenzo Ruiz and Pedro Calungsod

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Saints Lorenzo Ruiz and Pedro Calungsod

The Cathedral of Mary Our Queen

September 17, 2017

It is a joy to take part once again in this festive Eucharistic celebration honoring two great Filipino saints, San Lorenzo Ruiz and San Pedro Calungsod. This joyous Mass is the culmination of three nights of prayer and reflection, a triduum, during which you opened your hearts to the Holy Spirit asking him to implant in you a spirit of discipleship and a burning desire to serve the Church as missionary disciples – “to stir into flame [y]our love and service for the Lord.” May these days of prayer not only contribute to our joy at this Mass but also bear the abundant fruit of the Gospel in the Archdiocese!

Prior to this liturgy San Lorenzo Ruiz and San Pedro Calungsod were enthroned and there followed a traditional Sinolog Dance to honor these two saints. The life and example of these saints are engraved on the culture of the Philippines and written as well on your hearts, indeed, the hearts of all present here today. So, let us spend a moment prayerfully reflecting on their life and example and then allow them to shed light on today's challenging Scripture readings which teach about two essential qualities of missionary disciples.

As you know, both of these beloved saints lived in the 17th San Lorenzo was born in 1600 to a Chinese father and a Filipino mother – both of whom were devout Christians. As a young man he learned Tagalog from his Mother, Chinese from his Father, and the Dominicans priests taught him Spanish. Lorenzo was eventually married and was the father of two sons and he supported his family as a calligrapher and a transcriber of official documents. So, for this devout young man with a young

family, the future seemed bright, until, that is, he falsely accused of murder – then his world was turned upside down. Along with three Dominican priests, he sought refuge by boarding a ship headed to Japan, only to learn, once aboard, that a severe persecution was underway there. Lorenzo stayed with the Dominican missionaries who disembarked at Okinawa where their identity as Christians was soon learned. They were taken to Nagasaki and there they were cruelly tortured in the hope that they would renounce the faith but Lorenzo and the others refused. His profession of faith at the point of death should ring in our ears every day: “I will never renounce my faith because I am a Christian, and I shall die for God, and for him, I would give many thousands of lives if I had them. And so, do with me as you please.”

San Pedro was born in the mid-17th century but would live only 17 years. At a very early age, he opened his heart to the Lord in the Holy Spirit. Pedro had a special love for the Blessed Virgin Mary and a warm devotion to Jesus, truly present in the Eucharist. With his faith stirred into flame, he became a missionary catechist. Together with a Spanish missionary priest, Fr. Diego Luis de San Vitores, Pedro went to Guam where he spread the faith with courage and love. He preached the faith and baptized many, all the while putting his life at risk. What so many people really loved about Pedro was his kindness and patience amid the many obstacles and privations he faced in his missionary work. And his labors bore much fruit – many of the islanders were converted to Christ. As the result of these labors, he and Fr. Diego were put to death in 1672.

Dear friends, how grateful we should be for the example of these two saints who teach us two qualities of missionary discipleship found in our Scripture readings: namely, forgiveness and self-giving love, two qualities all of us need if we would be ardent Christians on fire with love for Jesus.

In the Book of Sirach, the Word of God warns us against being angry persons, vengeful persons who try to “get even” with those who offend us; it says this: “Forgive your neighbor’s injustice: then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven” and the reading goes on to say: “Could anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from the Lord?” As we hear these words, we know how easy it is to stoke in our hearts not the fire of the Holy Spirit but the fires of anger and revenge.

In the Gospel, we might say, Jesus “ups the ante”, he raises the stakes, so to speak. When asked how many times we should forgive those who wrong us, Jesus answers “not seven times” but “seventy-seven times” -it’s a way of saying that our capacity to forgive one another must be limitless. And he goes on to tell the story about the servant who could not repay his debt. The master forgave his debt but was disturbed to learn that this same servant would not forgive the debt of a fellow servant who owed much less. We cannot cancel out the debt of our sins but the Lord forgives us provided we are willing to forgive those who have sinned against us.

In San Lorenzo and San Pedro we see a gentle, forgiving, compassionate spirit. San Lorenzo forgave those who unjustly accused him of murder and he forgave those who tortured him unmercifully because of his faith. So too San Pedro was a youth whose whole demeanor was one of kindness, who taught more by example than by words the lesson of forgiveness, and who also forgave those who persecuted him and ultimately put him to death. These saints teach us that we cannot expect forgiveness of our sins unless we are willing to forgive others. Nor can we be witnesses to the Lord’s love before others until and unless we are willing to repent of our own sins and to forgive the sins of others – even when that is extremely difficult to do.

A second quality of missionary disciples so evident in today’s readings is the quality of a love that is generous and self-giving. We find this in St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans where the Apostle writes: “None of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself. For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord.”

It’s easy to see how San Lorenzo and San Pedro lived out these words. They devoted the whole of their lives not to their own comfort or advancement but rather to the Lord and to the mission of spreading the Gospel. And when called to give their lives as witness to Christ and to his love, they did so willingly and courageously. San Lorenzo and San Pedro lived for the Lord and they died for the Lord. Their love was modeled on and shared in the Lord’s own love – for Jesus laid down his life for us, so much did he love us.

If we would be true missionary disciples, then we must learn to live not for ourselves, not for our own comfort and convenience, but rather to live for others, to spend our lives in service to others. Persons who are self-centered and self-absorbed

attract no one to them but those whose love is generous and sincere engender trust and in the Holy Spirit attract others to Jesus and to the Christ.

Dear friends, what a joy to be with all of you today! Through the intercession of San Lorenzo Ruiz and San Pedro Calungsod, may we open our hearts daily to the Holy Spirit, allowing the Spirit to stir into flame our faith, forming us into disciples capable of bearing witness to Jesus because of our spirit of forgiveness and self-giving love.

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