

St. Gabriel Festival

Introduction - A Few Words in Italian

Buongiorno. E' per me un privilegio ed un'onore essere qui in mezzo a voi, con tanti dei quali condivido un comune retaggio italiano. [E davvero mi piacerebbe molto poter celebrare la Messa interamente in italiano!] Sono molto grato a Padre Sal che mi ha invitato ad essere qui ed a tutti voi che mi avete accolto con tanto calore! Ecome nel Vangelo di oggi sentiamo nostro Signore dire alla donna: "grande è la tua fede", è evidente che la fede di questa comunità è altrettanto grande. La vostra grande presenza rappresenta un testamento della forza e della ricca tradizione di questa parrocchia dedicata a San Leo il Grande.

"Mantieni la tua promessa a Dio!" Queste sono le parole la nostra Beata Madre disse a San Gabriele - colui che onoreremo nella processione che seguirà la Messa odierna - che gli ricordava che tutto quello che ha fatto deve essere per il Signore. Queste parole a buon diritto avrebbero potuto servire da motto per quegli italiani che fondarono e costruirono questa prima chiesa specificamente dedicata ad immigranti italiani nel Maryland. Per oltre cento trenta anni la parrocchia ha rappresentato l'ancora di questo quartiere provvedendo in infinite maniere alle necessità religiose e sociali dei suoi abitanti. Tutto l'infaticabile impegno messo in campo dalla comunità di fede dimostra la sua volontà di "Mantieni la tua promessa a Dio!"

Words of Appreciation in English

In the event my Italian was not crystal clear, let me offer a few very brief reflections in English. First I want to say a word about the Saint Gabriel Possenti in whose honor our procession and our entire festival is named.

As you know, he was born in Assisi in 1838 and lived only 24 years. His father, who was the Governor of Assisi, tried to convince his son Gabriel not to follow the vocation which God had in mind for him - that of a priest and religious. Gabriel was a talented, handsome young man who could have done anything. But he accepted the call to follow Christ as priest and a religious. He led a life of prayer and penance, devoted especially to the Crucified Savior and to Mary, the Mother of Sorrows, who stood beneath the Cross. Even though he died young, he attained great holiness. And

from his place in heaven, he attends to our petitions, to our needs.

These devotions remind me of today's Gospel. When the Canaanite woman asked Jesus to cure her daughter, the disciples tried to send her away, told her not to bother Jesus, but the woman's faith was strong so she persisted...and her daughter was cured. When we ask St. Gabriel to intercede for us, we too must have a strong and persistent faith like that of the Canaanite woman. We too must trust in Jesus and in his power to give us what we need to attain eternal salvation and to find true happiness by reflecting his love in our lives.

Welcoming the Stranger

There's something else in today's readings that remind me of this community of faith: All three readings speak about how God wants his truth and love to reach people from every land and nation. Isaiah foretells the day when foreigners, not just Jews, will worship the One True God. St. Paul describes himself as the Apostle to the Gentiles. And Jesus reaches out and cures the daughter of a Canaanite woman - who was considered to be a foreigner.

Ever since this church was dedicated in 1881, parishioners of St. Leo the Great have reached out to Italian immigrants - who, like my own grandfather, were considered foreigners when they arrived here. And now you continue to reach out to those who are newly arrived and those in need. I think of the St. Anthony Society that hosts an annual Christmas dinner for the homeless or the young adults who are part of Hearts and Hands that does so much to feed and care for the homeless and ill, serving meals at the Baltimore Rescue Mission and Karis House, and helping the Missionaries of Charity. And I think of your warm life of devotional prayer - especially Eucharistic adoration -...for it your closeness to Christ, to Mary, and to the saints that gives you the spiritual strength to reach out to others.

Conclusion

What a joy to be here and join me, won't you, in thanking Fr. Sal who ministers to St. Leo's with great love and devotion day in and day out. Join me also in thanking the Pallotines who have served this parish over 100 years.

May the Lord bless you and keep you always in his love.