

Sunday: Ordinary 13-A

Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Holy Rosary Cathedral

2

July 2017

Dear brother priests, deacons, and brothers and sisters:

Today's Gospel

In today's Gospel Jesus instructs his Apostles before sending them out on mission for the first time to the villages of Galilee and Judea. He does not want to work alone. He wants to involve others in the mission entrusted to him by the Father.¹ To prepare them, Jesus stresses the essential aspects of a missionary disciple's life. I will mention two of them: the first, that their bond with Jesus is to be stronger than any other human attachment; and second, that they will have to "lose" their life if they are to follow him along the way.

1. Giving Jesus Priority

"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Mt 10:37), says Jesus: a strong and demanding assertion. "The affection of a father, the tenderness of a mother, the sweet friendship between brothers and sisters, all this, though being very good and legitimate, cannot be put before Christ," Pope Francis said just this

¹ Cf. Francis, Angelus (8 September 2013).

morning in his Angelus address, “because the disciple’s condition calls for a priority relationship with the Teacher.”²

To follow Jesus is to make a radical choice, one requiring that we put our priorities in place. Even family claims, as St. Thomas More so clearly understood by remaining faithful to his conscience, despite the pleas of his wife and children, cannot outweigh Christ’s claim for being a disciple’s first love. And it is undoubtedly true that this claim of his can sometimes lead to hard choices.³

Let’s put this in the simplest and most direct terms. Jesus must be “number one” in our lives. He seems uninterested in being number two. “No one, no matter how close to you in love, no one comes before him.”⁴ But remember, too, that love for God by no means excludes other loves, but it does prioritize them, putting them in the proper order.

2. Losing one’s Life

The second condition for life as a disciple is to “take up one’s cross and follow Jesus, losing one’s life for his sake” (cf. Mt 10:38-39). Jesus asks this of his followers because he has first shown us the way by

² Francis, Angelus (2 July 2017).

³ Cf. David Lyle Jeffrey, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012), 188.

⁴ Cf. Walter J. Burghardt, *Dare To Be Christ: Homilies for the Nineties* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1991), 84.

his own obedience to the Father even unto death on the Cross (cf. Phil 2:8). Whenever we experience our own crosses, he has already experienced that suffering before us. We do not take up our cross to find Jesus. Rather, it was he who descended even to the cross, in order to find and save us, to dispel the darkness of evil within us, and to bring us to the light.⁵

But what does “losing one’s life for his sake” mean (cf. Mt 10:39)? “It is the logic of the grain of wheat that dies in order to sprout and bring new life (cf. Jn 12:24). Jesus himself is that grain of wheat which came from God, the divine grain that lets itself fall to the ground, that lets itself sink, be broken down in death and precisely by so doing germinates and can thus bear fruit in the immensity of the world.”⁶

What Jesus is saying about “losing our life,” I believe, is this: we can surrender ourselves completely to another person, “lose or spend our life,” only if by doing so we fall into the hands of God. Only in him and for him does it make sense to lose ourselves, to surrender ourselves completely. Only in him can we truly find ourselves, our fulfillment and our happiness.

⁵ Cf. Francis, Homily, Fatima (13 May 2017).

⁶ Benedict XVI, Address to the Evangelical Lutheran Community at the Christuskirche, Rome (14 March 2010).

This attitude can all summed up in the prayer of St. Ignatius Loyola – “a prayer which always seems to me so overwhelming,” admitted Pope Benedict, that he was “almost afraid to say it, yet one which, for all its difficulty, we should always repeat”⁷:

Take O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will. All that I have and all that I possess you have given me: I surrender it all to you; it is all yours, dispose of it according to your will. Give me only your love and your grace; with these I will be rich enough and will desire nothing more.

Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

On this Canada Day weekend, when we are celebrating the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation, the Bishops of Canada are consecrating our nation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Shortly we will make this prayer together, imploring Our Lady’s intercession for, and maternal guidance upon, our country, so richly blessed but also struggling to remain faithful to its highest values, which are grounded in the Gospel and the moral conscience of humankind.

The Immaculate Heart of Mary symbolizes her maternal love, a tender love first shown to Jesus, her Son, and then extended to each one

⁷ Benedict XVI, Homily at Vespers, Mariazell (8 September 2007).

of us as her spiritual sons and daughters placed under her protective mantel on Calvary.

Through love of her Son and of all of humanity, Mary brings us individually and as a people to him. In the words of St. John Paul II: “If we turn to Mary’s Immaculate Heart she will surely help us to conquer the menace of evil, which so easily takes root in the hearts of the people of today, and whose immeasurable effects already weigh down upon our modern world and seem to block the paths towards the future.”⁸

In order that we might grow as a “holy nation” and assume our responsibility of sharing in the building up of the Kingdom, it is fitting that we should turn to Mary to intercede with the Lord for us: that our people may be increasingly disposed to the Good News of salvation, and that they will strive to forge a just society according to God’s design. By consecrating ourselves and our nation to Our Lady, we pray that a fresh enthusiasm and a deeper faith will be born in the hearts of believers which will bear fruit and abundant graces for all Canadians.

The act of entrusting ourselves to the Immaculate Heart of Mary through this act of consecration reinforces our relationship of love with her through whom we dedicate all that we have and all that we are to our

⁸ St. John Paul II, St. John Paul II, Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (26 September 1986).

almighty and ever-living God.

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