

Saturday 27: B
Education Committees

St. Mary's Church

13 October 2018

Dear brother priests, Deacon Henk, members of the various parish and regional education committees throughout the Archdiocese, and dear friends in Christ:

Introduction

It is fitting that those of you who are serving on the various Parish and Regional Education Committees begin this day with the Eucharist, imploring the good Lord for the grace to fulfil the vocation and mission that you have so generously assumed on behalf of your school communities. I thank you for being here on this Saturday morning and, above all, I thank you for accepting this challenging responsibility.

Hearing and Obeying Jesus, the Word of God

Like the woman in today's Gospel who exclaims how impressive Jesus is and how blessed his mother must feel for giving birth to him, we too can easily see Jesus as only a person to be admired. Many people see Jesus that way. He has "something" to say to them, but he is not the bearer of the Word of God which brings demands and challenges as well as comfort and consolation.

In our Gospel passage from Luke Jesus rejects this kind of admiration. That's of little interest to him. Mary is indeed "blessed," but it is not primarily because of her biological relationship to her Son –

stupendous though that was – but because she was, above all, a disciple, the greatest disciple, who heard the word of God and obeyed it (cf. Lk 11:28).

Like every other recipient of God’s grace and favour, Mary is blessed for keeping the Word – obeying God’s plan – just as we must. “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord,” Elizabeth said to Mary at the Visitation.

Like us, Mary’s life was a pilgrimage she made in faith. It all started simply enough at the Annunciation, which is “the point of departure from which her whole ‘journey towards God’ begins.”¹ Hers was a life of absolute trust in God which advanced down the tortuous paths of exile in Egypt and of inner darkness, when Mary “did not understand” the attitude of her twelve-year-old Son in the temple and yet kept “all these things in her heart” Lk 2:51).

Certainly, glimmers of light were not missing from Mary’s life, as at the wedding of Cana, where, even in his apparent indifference, Jesus granted his Mother’s request and worked his first miracle (cf. Jn 2:1-12).

¹ St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 14.

The peak of Mary's earthly pilgrimage of faith was Golgotha – and each of us has his or her own Calvary where we are tested, often seemingly beyond our limits. There Mary intimately lived her Son's suffering and death. In a certain sense she died as a mother in the death of the Son and was opened to the "resurrection" with a new motherhood of the Church (cf. Jn 19: 25-27). There, on Calvary, Mary experienced the night of faith,² a questioning of God's goodness in seeing her Son killed before her eyes. But she never ceased to believe that God's plan was unfolding and that he was with her. Indeed, he drew her to himself in the second outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost and in the final embrace of her Assumption into heaven.

More than anyone else in the history of salvation Mary embodied Jesus' word about hearing, trusting and obeying the Word of God.

Listening and hearing. These words are repeated over and over again in the Gospels as key to discipleship, a first step: obedient listening to the Word of God himself. "This is my Son, the Beloved . . . listen to him" (Mt 17:5). "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock" (Mt 7:24). "My mother and my brothers are those who the word of God and do it" (Lk 8:21). "Anyone who hears my word and believes him who

² Cf. John Paul II, General Audience (21 March 2001).

sent me has eternal life” (Jn 5:24).

Indeed, ultimately, first listening to the Word of God and then putting it into practice, are crucial to our lives as followers of Jesus.

One way to listen to the word of God is the practice of *lectio divina*; that is, reading the Bible and linking that reading with prayer; to let oneself be amazed by the freshness of the Word of God that never ages and is the treasure that is never depleted. That living Word – for it is Jesus himself who speaks, not the words on a page – overcomes our deafness.³

Jesus’ lesson today is simple. Before we “act” as Christians, before we serve others, we must first “be” in Jesus’ presence and listen to him.⁴ Otherwise, how would we know that it is *his* voice we are hearing and that it is his way that we are following?

Our mission of evangelization – what we propose as the overarching vision and mission of our Archdiocese – therefore entails that we give pride of place to listening to the Word of God. Only then can we pass on our experience of Jesus, our intimacy with Word of joy and hope, and transmit it to others, to those who have never heard it, or who have forgotten it, or have distorted it, or have buried under the

³ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily at Vespers (25 January 2007).

⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 15.

thorny troubles and deceptions of the world (cf. Mt 13:22).

Listening to the Word does not replace love of neighbour; “but it is more basic, it is love’s motivation, love’s driving force.”⁵

God speaks to us by means of the events in our life, in which we are able to discern his presence. He speaks also through the beauty of nature and the wonder of creation. But he speaks above all through his Word, in Sacred Scripture, read in communion with the Church. It is important that we read the Bible in a very personal way, and really, as St Paul says, not as a human word or a document from the past as we read Shakespeare or a novel, but as God’s Word which speaks personally to me in my trials and sorrows, hopes and joy.

Conclusion

This morning, we turn to Mary so that she may take us by the hand so that we can really hear God’s word and obey it in our daily lives. Then we too can one day be numbered among the blessed who join her in the company of God and all the Saints.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB

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⁵ Walter J. Burghardt, *Christ in Ten Thousand Places: Homilies toward a New Millennium* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1999), 129.