

Tuesday: Ordinary 28-B

St. Marguerite d'Youville

Catholic Pacific College

16 October 2018

Dear Father Lawrence, dear faculty, staff and students:

Today's Canadian Saint

Today the Church in Canada is celebrating the feast of one of our own: St. Marguerite d'Youville, born in 1701. She was a great Canadian woman, and is our first native-born Saint. Hers was a hard life. After her marriage to François , the young couple made their home with his mother, who made life miserable for her daughter-in-law. Moreover, Marguerite soon came to realize that her husband had no interest in making a home life. His frequent absences and illegal liquor trading with the native peoples caused her great suffering. She was pregnant with her sixth child when he became seriously ill. She faithfully cared for him until his death in 1730. By age 29, she had experienced poverty and had suffered the loss of her husband and four of her six children, who had died in infancy.

In all these sufferings Marguerite grew in her belief of God's presence in her life and of his tender love for every human person. As a result of this spiritual insight, she determined to make known the Lord's compassionate love to all. She undertook many charitable works with complete trust in God. Marguerite provided for the education of her two sons, who later became priests, and she welcomed a blind woman into

her home. She was soon joined by three young women who shared her love and concern for the poor. On December 31, 1737, they consecrated themselves to God and promised to serve him in the person of the poor. Marguerite, without even realizing it, had become the foundress of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, the Grey Nuns, who served for many, many years here in the schools and health-care facilities of the Archdiocese.

Marguerite always fought for the rights of the poor and broke with the social conventions of her day. Hers was a daring move that made her the object of ridicule and taunts by her own relatives and neighbours. She persevered in caring for the marginalized despite many obstacles and came to be known as “mother of the poor.” Totally exhausted from a lifetime of self-giving, Marguerite died on December 23, 1771. She will always be remembered as a loving mother who served Jesus Christ in the poor. Indeed, she fulfilled beautifully what St. Paul wrote to the Galatians as we heard in today’s First Reading: “the only thing that counts is faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). It is faith, expressing itself through love of God and neighbour, that is salvific. This is the way we become saints.

Gospel

Today's short Gospel presents Jesus in one of his encounters with the Pharisees. He takes advantage of the situation to make an important point about what actions or what behaviour really matter in the Kingdom of God.

In terms of what we expect at a dinner party, Jesus is more than a little abrasive at the table of the Pharisee from whom he accepted an invitation. The religious leader is amazed that Jesus does not observe the prescribed ritual washing before the meal, a custom not required by the Law of Moses but from later tradition. By this gesture, Jesus is making a point on which he then elaborates.

Jesus' behaviour "triggers" – as people now say – a stern reproof of all the Pharisees gathered for the celebration, calling them "fools" (Lk 11:40), a term often applied to the wicked. The Lord's main objection to the Pharisees is that they are overly concerned with outward, ritual practices and neglect the what is interior, where contamination originates.¹ They make the outside clean but leave the inside filthy (cf. Lk 11:39).

We can't overlook that this remark is tantamount to an invited guest lifting his empty plate at the beginning of a meal and exclaiming to

¹ Cf. Pablo T. Gadenz, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 231.

the host, “This wasn’t washed properly.” But, of course, Jesus is not really concerned here about politeness. Something a lot more serious is on his mind.

Here Jesus does not comfort or affirm the host and his guests. As is also often the case his words provoke and irritate, perhaps even confuse. He criticizes – and we all know how difficult it is to accept criticism, especially if not offered gingerly. But criticize Jesus must. It’s good for us to be shaken up the Gospel, to have our thoughts and actions questioned, and good to have our comfort and satisfaction disturbed – and not just by the Lord but by those who know us.²

Moreover, how easy it is for us to be caught up in externals, to want things “just so” – as if that alone were pleasing to God. In our hearts we know this is not the case, but, strangely, we still often act as if it were so.

² Cf. Don Talafous, *Homilies for Weekdays, Year 1* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006), 192.

Where Jesus mercy enters into this account is that he not only condemns but also provides a way out for the Pharisees. Like us, they are not stuck where they are. They can give alms, so as to cleanse the contamination within (cf. Lk 11:41). Alms – the giving of money, food or help to the poor – was already regarded in Judaism as a means of obtaining forgiveness for offenses.³

This lesson cannot be over looked, and it follows a pattern. Whenever Jesus makes a demand or offers a condemnation he has remediation in mind. He offers us his grace, his presence with us, so that we may avoid stumbling in the future.

Conclusion

Now, as we continue this Mass, he offers us the greatest grace of all: making us worthy to be in his presence and to be nourished by the gift of himself to us in Holy Communion.

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³ Cf. David Lyle Jeffrey, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, Brazos Press, 2012), 161-162.