

Homily For Saturday of the 29th Week of Ordinary Time - Year II

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - Oct. 22, 2022

(Optional Memorial: St. John Paul II, Pope)

Ephesians 4:7-16 "Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift."

Psalm 122:1-5 "I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"

Luke 13:1-9 "Unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

Repent or Perish

Introduction

Today, the Church gives us St. John Paul II as an optional memorial. It is also, as is on this day of every week, Our Lady's Saturday. There is also, either by chance or by the Holy Spirit, a beautiful juxtaposition with the first reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, so I will start with that.

Ephesians

Today's portion of this letter begins, "Each of us was given grace according the measure of Christ's gift." We might ask, well what is the measure of Christ's gift? He is truly God, Son of God made human, as we declare in the creeds. Is there a limit to God's generosity? Of course not. In Christ, we see the fullness of that generosity. The first paragraph of the Catechism begins, "God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness, freely created us so that he might share his blessed life with us." What is the evidence of his blessed life? We see it in Jesus himself. And what can Jesus give? Eternal life. We talk about this all the time. Paul lists the gifts that are given to the Church: gifts for teaching, evangelizing and all the rest.

When it comes to Mary, his mother, he gives her what he is able to give, and so to honour her as the 4th commandment requires. He holds back nothing from Mary. He gives her the fruit of redemption even at her conception. He frees her from original sin. He makes her the mother of the saviour and of the Church, especially

when he gives her to John the beloved disciple at the foot of his cross. This and much more.

St. John Paul II

Pope St. John Paul had such a great love for Mary. In one place, he puts it like this. His writing, like Paul's, requires that we pay close attention to see the depth of his teaching. He says: "In the economy of grace, there is a unique correspondence between the moment of the Incarnation of the Word and the moment of the birth of the Church. The person who links these two moments is Mary: Mary at Nazareth and Mary in the Upper Room at Jerusalem. In both cases her discreet yet essential presence indicates the path of 'birth from the Holy Spirit'. Thus she who is present in the mystery of Christ as Mother becomes, by the will of the Son and the power of the Holy Spirit, present in the mystery of the Church. In the Church too she continues to be a maternal presence, as is shown by the words spoken from the Cross: 'Woman, behold your son!'; 'Behold your mother.'"

Many other things we could relate about his holiness of life. Many of us lived in his pontificate, which he began with the great consoling words of Sacred Scripture and of Jesus himself: Be not afraid. St. John Paul was the first pope ever to visit Canada. Interestingly for us after the visit by Pope Francis, John Paul was to visit an indigenous community in the north, but the weather was so terrible, it was impossible. He promised to come back just for that purpose. Three years later, he did just that. People forget that all those years ago, we already had a saintly pope who was forging reconciliation by keeping a promise at great cost.

In 2002, he was in Toronto for World Youth Day. We were at the closing mass with 800,000 others, many of whom screamed, "We love you, John Paul." And he would call back, "And John Paul loves you." As with our Lord himself, in imitation of his weakness on the cross, John Paul was in the late stages of Parkinson's. Many called for him to resign because of his health, but he showed us how to manifest the graces of Jesus Christ, in human weakness but in God's strength.

Luke

In the Gospel today, we have one of the few places where Pilate is mentioned outside the passion narratives. Many see him as a weak governor who feels overwhelmed by the mob and against his better judgment, he hands Jesus over to be crucified. The historian Josephus refers to an uprising of Jews that he ruthlessly suppressed by having Roman soldiers mixed among the Jews. At a given signal, they began to hack away at the civilian population. Pilate sacrificing Galileans along with their sacrifices. There are also ruins of an ancient tower along one of the ancient walls of Jerusalem. Many pagan cults had called these events the wrath of capricious gods. Even Jewish religious teachers said it was the result of sin. Instead, Jesus is saying that suffering comes to good and bad alike, and that all humankind stands in need of repentance and redemption. Someone's misfortune is not an indicator of moral culpability. Perhaps you remember the same discussion about the man born blind. Did this man sin or was it his parents. The fig tree is highly prized. The lesson is that God will not give up on those who struggle with turning toward him.

The great value placed on the fig tree characterizes the value of the sinner in God's eyes, despite the possibility that the sinner may never bear fruit. Jesus twice emphasizes the necessity of repentance for salvation. It is the doorway to receptivity of the grace he offers. The fig tree of three years did not bear fruit. The gardener asks for time to bring new life to the tree. In the parable, God is that gardener. Jesus is telling them that he has manifested himself for three years in ministry. If there is no response, he will put that effort into souls who are more receptive. We need to bear fruit and so not waste his grace and his gifts.

Call To Conversion

Pope Francis tells us about this, "Authentic faith, open to others and to forgiveness, works miracles. The fig tree represents infertility, a barren life, incapable of giving anything. Jesus curses the fig tree because it made no effort to bear fruit." Let us be open to the grace offered to us in Christ, which he desires to pour into our hearts and lives, as he did with St. John Paul II, and as he did so richly in Mary, his mother, as he desires to do for us, his body, the Church.

Key Scripture Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *Save us, Lord. Gather us from the nations to give thanks to your holy name*

Collect: *Grant us Lord our God, that we may honour you with all our mind, and love everyone in truth of heart.*

Ephesians: *Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up into him who is the head, into Christ.*

Psalm: *I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"*

Luke: *Some in the crowd told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. Jesus asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them, were they worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did." Then Jesus told this parable: "A man had a fig tree and he found no fruit on it. So he said to the gardener, Cut it down. Why should it be wasting the soil? The gardener replied, Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down.*