

Homily For Tuesday of the 33rd Week of Ordinary Time - Year 1

St Peter's 8:30/7:00 Masses - November 20, 2023

(Memorial - Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary)

2 Maccabees 6:18-31 "I will leave to the young an example of how to die a good death."

Psalms 3:1-6 "I am not afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me."

Luke 19:1-10 "If I have defrauded anyone, I will pay back four times as much."

The Joy of Sacrifice

Introduction

Today we have one of those feasts that can make us look, to outsiders at least, a little too crazy about Mary, a little too much like we think *she* is the Saviour, not Jesus. A television evangelist named John McArthur seeks consistently to make the Catholic Church look very bad on this issue. To make his point, he quotes a theologian from the 12th century about Mary's necessary role in salvation. He calls it 'exposing the idolatry of Mary worship.' If you come across him on television or radio, you must turn the channel. He will sound like he is given basic Christian teaching, but then condemns a billion Catholics and Orthodox to hell. Don't be fooled by such venom.

We might even look at how none of the original Protestant so called reformers rejected the teaching on Mary. That wasn't their issue at all. Only later, seeking to separate themselves further from the Catholic Church did their hatred of Marian theology surface. This was part of a movement called 'iconoclasm', which is the hatred of religious images as heretical. It happens in every age.

Presentation of Mary

According to tradition, the Blessed Virgin Mary was consecrated to God when she was three years of age by her parents, St. Anne and St. Joachim. They presented her before God in the Jerusalem temple where she was to be educated and raised. This dedication was a result of a promise St. Anne made to God while she suffered from many years of infertility. The liturgical honoring of this event appeared in the East much earlier than it did in the West.

2 Maccabees

Eleazar was 90 years old at a time of great persecution. Antiochus Epiphanes IV took on the title 'Epiphanes'. It is the same word as our feast of Epiphany, which means a manifestation of God. Such was his extreme arrogance. There is a tendency amongst the tyrants of history to take on or assume for themselves divine attributes. Many Jews, under pressure, began to go along with this. Many in Israel were unfaithful because of the powerful cultural desire to get rid of the signs of religious identity. If you had parts of the Torah, the Word of God, in your home, you would be executed publicly. The big question then, as it is now, was whether the people will assimilate, will go along with the culture to make it easier on themselves.

Even Eleazar's friends ask him to pretend to eat pork so he could prolong his life. Even they turn against him when he says: "Should I pretend to go along with the world in order to gain a bit of extra life but, at the same time, lead others astray? No, I will leave behind a witness for the holy laws of God." It is not just living a good life that matters, but also setting an example, especially to the young.

Luke

Zacchaeus is not at the end of his life, and is not tortured except by social ridicule. However, he IS longing for something more than wealth and status. He has not led a holy life but his heart is ready for conversion. Like Eleazar, he is willing to look foolish to do what is right. This is certainly a kind of martyrdom. It is a putting to death the goals and desires of earthly life for a heavenly treasure. He receives Jesus into his home, his life and his heart. His conversion is total. He begins by giving up any ambition for riches, followed with the intention to share his goods. St. Gregory of Nazianzen says that, when we do good, we must do it, not sadly, but with joy."

Call to Conversion

The way of the world says, just fit in with the culture. Just do what everyone else is doing. Just eat the forbidden flesh, the forbidden fruit. It's good. It's easier. That's why the world hates Jesus, who consistently proclaims that there is a way

of salvation and there is the way of the lost. But there is another kind of fruit, one that leads away from fear of death and towards eternal life. Jesus never stops calling out to the lost. That's all of us, without exception. Jesus invites us, not just to a holy life, but also a holy death. Do not be afraid of death. It holds no power over those who have faith. Our Lord is waiting for us to receive from him the gift of the joy of eternal life.

Eleazar makes an offering of his life to the Lord, rather than a pagan sacrifice, so that the young will have a holy example to follow. Zacchaeus publicly offers up half of what he has to make reparation for his sins. Mary's parents offer their beloved daughter totally to the Lord, and we know that this sacrifice changes the whole world. Each had joy in their souls to give what they have to the Lord. We learn from all three that the key to love is joyful sacrifice. We might begin our sacrifice by tithing, giving 10% of our income to the Lord. At some point we enter on to the path of total self giving so that we might joyfully hear the Lord say to us, "Today salvation has come to this house, for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost."

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *O God, defend your cause and forget not the cries of those who seek you.*

Collect: *Almighty ever living God, we pray that we may merit to enter into the inheritance which you have promised.*

Maccabees: *Eleazar was being forced to open his mouth to eat swine's flesh. But he went up to the rack of his own, spitting out the flesh. Those who were in charge of that unlawful sacrifice, because of their long acquaintance with him, privately urged him to bring meat of his own and to pretend that he was eating the flesh of the sacrificial meal that had been commanded by the king, so that he might be saved from death. But worthy of his years and the dignity of his old age, and according to the holy God given law, he declared: Such pretence is not worthy of our time of life, for many of the young might suppose that Eleazar in his ninetieth year had gone over to an alien religion and, for the sake of living a brief moment longer, they would be led astray because of me. Even if for the present I would avoid the punishment of mortals, yet whether I live or die I shall not escape the hands of the Almighty. I will leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death. Those who a little before had acted toward him with goodwill now changed to ill will because the words he had uttered were in their opinion sheer madness. When he was about to die under the blows, he groaned: I am enduring terrible sufferings in my body under this beating, but in my soul I am glad to suffer these things because I fear him. So in this way Eleazar died, leaving in his death an example.*

Psalm: *You, O Lord are a shield around me, my glory, and the one who lifts up my head. I cry aloud to the Lord, and he answers me. The Lord sustains me. I am not afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around.*

Luke: *Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him. Jesus looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." All who saw it said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said of him, "Today salvation has come to this house, for the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."*