

Homily for February 14, 2017

Although today is best known as St. Valentine's Day, in 1969 the Roman Catholic Church removed his name from the General Roman Calendar. So while you may ply your beloved with roses and or chocolates on this day, today we celebrate the memorials of St. Cyril, Monk, and his brother St. Methodius, Bishop. Cyril died in Rome in 869 and was buried in the church of San Clemente. Methodius returned to Moravia, where he was later appointed archbishop. Before his death in 884, Methodius had translated almost the entire Bible into Slavonic. Pope John Paul named them patrons of Europe, along with St. Benedict

Today it is St. Cyril I want to concentrate on, who died in Rome at the age of 42. I want to focus on him because we have been graced with a most beautiful prayer, one that he prayed minutes before his death.

Let's listen into this prayer of St. Cyril and may it inspire us to cultivate the same attitude in life and in death. But let me go back fifty days before his death. At that time he had a vision of God which lead him to declare:

"From now on, I am not the servant of the emperor or of any man on earth, but of almighty God alone. Before, I was dead, now I am alive and I shall live forever. Amen."

What a perspective to have in life, and how freeing. Here is this man suffering and gravely ill who is able to declare that even though physical death was drawing close, he is now more alive than he had ever been before. Listen now to his deathbed prayer. St Cyril knowing himself to be a servant of Almighty God prays seeing heaven aright and seeing God as the creator of all:

"O Lord, my God, you have created the choirs of angels and spiritual powers; you have stretched forth the heavens and established the earth, creating all that exists from nothing.

He then moves onto celebrating the lives of those who live in obedience to God:

You hear those who obey your will and keep your commands in holy fear. Hear my prayer and protect your faithful people, for you have established me as their unsuitable and unworthy servant.

He not only affirms how he has known the care of God but also prays for God's protection of his people after he had died. Why is such protection necessary? The next part of his prayer contains the answer:

"Keep them free from harm and the worldly cunning of those who blaspheme you. Build up your Church and gather all into unity. Make your people known for the unity and profession of their faith. Inspire the hearts of your people with your word and your teaching. You called

us to preach the Gospel of your Christ and to encourage them to lives and works pleasing to you.

In the world there are those, who in the words of our reading from Genesis are inclined towards evil continually. The Church is that community, that like Noah's Ark, is the family of true unity, where through the teaching of the Church people can grow in godliness and true holiness so we can have lives and do works pleasing to God.

His prayer then ends with St. Cyril, entrusting God's people, who had been entrusted to him, back to the Father:

"I now return to you, your people, your gift to me. Direct them with your powerful right hand, and protect them under the shadow of your wings. May all praise and glorify your name, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen."

Having concluded his pray we are then told:

Once he had exchanged the gift of peace with everyone, he said: "Blessed be God, who did not hand us over to our invisible enemy, but freed us from his snare and delivered us from perdition." He then fell asleep in the Lord at the age of forty-two.

Here is the heart, of a true man of God, who confidently and trustingly faced his own death with serenity. He could do this because he knew that heaven is for real, he realistically understood the influence of evil in the world but equally knew that the Church was the Ark of Peter, on which God's people could grow in holiness; as they journey through the waters of this world and so be freed from the hand of our invisible enemy and so be delivered into the hands of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

May this prayer inspire us to live with determination lives of holiness and pray for a holy death. Let us pray:

O God, great and omnipotent judge of the living and the dead, we are to appear before you after this short life to render an account of our works. Give us the grace to prepare for our last hour by a devout and holy life, and protect us against a sudden and unprovided death. Let us remember our frailty and mortality, that we may always live in the ways of your commandments. Teach us to "watch and pray" (Lk 21:36), that when your summons comes for our departure from this world, we may go forth to meet you, experience a merciful judgment, and rejoice in everlasting happiness. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen