

Homily for January 7, 2017

As we come to the close of 1 John the Apostle ends his letter with a stern warning:

“Little children keep yourself away from idols.”

St. John was writing his letter to Christians in Ephesus a centre of idolatry. It was the home of the goddess Diana and her temple was a place of debauchery - where sexual vice of all kinds was celebrated. The Temple was also a place of sanctuary for criminals. If they could make it to the Temple precincts they would be free from arrest. Therefore it was characterized by illicit sex and illicit people whose lives were marked by violence and evil. This Temple was considered one of the wonders of the ancient world. And you have to wonder why given what went on in that place. Just goes to show, be it in the 1st century or the 21st century vice and sin are celebrated and endorsed by so many.

And this, by the way is where John lived, and our blessed Mother spent the last years of her life. They were not secluded in some Turkish retreat but living in the heart of a pagan world.

Idolatry when described in the Bible expressed as a lifestyle where people are following the passions of the flesh – doing whatever they please. Like in Canada today where people are choosing one of 56 varieties of gender identity, aborting their young, killing their aging parents or people asking for a doctor to assist them in ending their lives. Not to mention the plague of sexual promiscuity and variation that is part of modern day Canada.

The point is, St. John’s letter is one for our time too. We have to keep ourselves from idols because although Dianna doesn’t have a Temple in Calgary, her practices are carried on by many because as John tells us the world is under the power of the evil one.

So what are we to do in a world like this? Pray. Listen to the Apostle:

I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. 14 And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

The basis of prayer is the simple fact that God listens to our prayers. The word which John uses for confidence is interesting. It is parrēsia. Originally, parrēsia meant freedom of speech, that freedom to speak boldly which exists in a true democracy. Later, it came to mean any kind of confidence. With God, we have freedom of speech. He is always listening, more ready to hear than we are to pray. We never need to force our way into his presence or compel him to pay attention. He is waiting for us to come

But at the heart of this prayer is asking in accordance with his will. Here is something on which to ponder. We are so apt to think that prayer is asking God for what we want, whereas true prayer is asking God for what he wants. Prayer is not only talking to God; even more, it is listening to him.

It is this that was at the heart of our Lady's life. She was always seeking the will of the Father in the place like Ephesus. We are inspired by her example to live with the same purpose here in Calgary!

John then goes on to give an example of the kind of prayer we should offer.

16 If any one sees his brother committing what is not a deadly sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not deadly. There is sin which is deadly; I do not say that one is to pray for that. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not deadly.

The deadly sin in view here is probably apostasy. Those who were so enamoured by the idolatry of Ephesus had turned away from Jesus and the Church. It is not clear why such a person should not be prayed for. Perhaps at a time like that their willfulness is so opposed to the Lord, that they are needed to experience the full effects of a godless life style. But prayer for the person who is struggling with the influence of the Ephesian culture is definitely to be offered.

Similarly we are to pray for each other that in our struggle against sin the climate of this idolatrous culture will be the opportunity for us to draw ever closer to the merciful Father.

May this letter be one you return to time and again in your own study so that we can be encouraged to flee idolatry and the power of the Evil One as we live in a world like this as children of the one who came from the other and better world and will one day, we hope take us home to the Father's House.