

Homily for July 15th 2020

The Feast Day of St Bonaventure

C.S. Lewis once wrote that being humble was much more than a question of virtue or imitation of Christ but a way to know God and accept salvation: “As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down you cannot see something that is above you” (*Mere Christianity*).

St Bonaventure (1221-1274) was known for his humility. A close friend of St. Thomas Aquinas, born four years later. They both died within months of each other in 1274. St Thomas in March, and St Bonaventure on July 15th of that year. Saint Thomas once asked St Bonaventure from where he drew his great learning. He replied by pointing to his crucifix. At another time Saint Thomas found him in ecstasy while writing the life of Saint Francis, and exclaimed, “Let us leave a Saint to write of a Saint.” .

St Bonaventure was the guest and adviser of Saint Louis IX and the director of Saint Isabella, the king’s sister. St Louis is best known for building St. Chapelle, the walls made entirely of stained glass, built to be the reliquary for the Crown of Thorns. Gregory X appointed him Cardinal Bishop of Albano. When the Saint heard of the Pope’s resolve to create him a Cardinal, he quietly made his escape from Italy. But Gregory sent him a summons to return to Rome. On his way, he stopped to rest himself at a convent of his Order near Florence; and there two Papal messengers, sent to meet him with the Cardinal’s hat, found him washing the dishes. The Saint desired them to hang the hat on a bush that was near, and take a walk in the garden until he had finished what he was about. Then taking up the hat with unfeigned sorrow, he joined the messengers, and paid them the respect due to their character

St Bonaventure embodied the principle Jesus expresses so clearly in today’s Gospel that the truth of his person is revealed, not to the proud but rather to the humble. When we can embrace the way of Christ-like-humility then in turn we come to an understanding of who Jesus is as the one who reveals the Father to us, and thereby we come to know Jesus more fully.

St Bonaventure beautifully described God’s humble love as bending down to us: “The eternal God humbly bent down and lifted the dust of our nature in to unity with his own person” This is a succinct way to articulate the theme of today’s Gospel. (*Sermon II on the Nativity of the Lord*). For the great Franciscan, the greatness of God’s love is seen by bridging polar opposites: “God’s power is his humility; God’s strength is his weakness; God’s greatness is his lowliness” (*The Mind’s Journey to God*, 6.5). Remember how he answered St. Thomas, when asked the source of his great learning by pointing to the crucifix?

May St Bonaventure inspire us to take to heart our Lord’s thanksgiving prayer in today’s Gospel so that as we prayed in today’s Collect we may imitate Saint Bonaventure’s humility as we say:

**Grant, we pray,
Almighty God, that,
just as we celebrate the heavenly birthday
of the Bishop Saint Bonaventure,**

**we may benefit from his great learning
and constantly imitate the ardor of his charity.**