

Homily for September 18, 2019  
Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time

“The True Spirit of the Church”

The great American bishop and preacher Fulton Sheen once wrote:

***“Judge the Catholic Church not by those who barely live by its spirit, but by the example of those who live closest to it”.***

In other words, allow for those people whose lives are steeped in authentic Catholicism to be her true representatives. Those who live closest to the true Spirit of the Church are the Saints, with a capital S. We mark their lives to celebrate the gift of their witness, not only when they lived but as their stories have reverberated through the centuries.

Today, there is no specific saint whose Feast Day we mark. Therefore, I want us to think about Fulton Sheen’s quote in relation to ourselves. – that is, you and me. We too are called to be saints, to live very close to the true Spirit of the Church.

I want to share with you another quote, from a 19<sup>th</sup> Century French Man named Leon Bloy. Bloy grew up in a household deeply influenced by the spirit of the French Revolution – his was an atheist earlier in life and disdained the Catholic Church. But around mid-life he had a Parisian neighbour who embodied the words of Fulton Sheen, a man who exemplified the true Spirit of the Church. With time, his developing relationship with his neighbour resulted in Leon’s conversion. This man who had been so hostile to the Church and dismissive of God wrote these words after becoming Catholic:

***“The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint.”***

Listen to the emphasis:

Only real sadness, only real failure, only great tragedy is not to become a saint. Sadness, failure and tragedy. Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) was a friend of Leon Bloy. As a younger man he pledged that if he couldn’t discover the meaning of life within a year, he would kill himself; caught up by materialism and relativism he concluded life is worthless and unless he could find meaning, it would lights out, curtains. Bloy’s influence on Maritain was great. He did not kill himself, living to 91, and became one of the greatest Catholic Philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

What is the point I am making? It is this. When we live closely to the true Spirit of the Church, our lives will be changed because this influence of authentic Catholicism will permeate us.

St. Paul understood this so clearly. He was writing to his prodigee Timothy, who was a pastor in Ephesus. In Ephesus there was a Greek goddess named Artemis, who was the main spiritual influence of that City. Just as the Slogan for Calgary, is “Be Part of the Energy”, the Slogan for Ephesus was: “Artemis is Great”.

Now with this is mind listen to Paul’s words to Timothy:

***Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great.***

It isn't Artemis but Jesus who is great, the one who is at the heart of our faith. In Paul's language the word mystery, means something that had been hidden and is now revealed. What has been revealed? The true nature of Jesus Christ, who Paul goes on to describe by quoting a very early Christian Creed:

*He was revealed in flesh,  
vindicated in spirit,  
seen by angels,  
proclaimed among Gentiles,  
believed in throughout the world,  
taken up in glory.<sup>1</sup>*

In six lines we have a clear statement of Jesus' incarnation, resurrection as seen by angels, his message proclaimed, even to non-Jews, that is Gentiles, as he would come to be believed throughout the world, -that was prophetic, and his ascension. Paul is so captivated by how great is the mystery of our faith, he declares that the Church – because of Jesus is the household of God, the Church of the Living God and the pillar and bulwark of truth. A pillar supports a structure and a bulwark is a wall like structure raised for defence. The more we come to know the one who is Truth, Jesus Christ, he both supports us in our faith and defends us from the world's attack. With such a solid structure we discover that the Church is the household of the living and God.

When we come to believe this with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength we will be living according to the true Spirit of the Church and will the Bloy and Maritain celebrate not only the Saints with a capital "S", but that we too are called to live each day purposefully as saints in the making.

---

<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (1 Ti 3:16). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.