

Day of Recollection for Advent
Morning Mass Homily
November 18, 2017
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It is interesting how the Word of God always anticipates our needs. When we were planning for this particular date, we were not looking at the Liturgy of the Word, saying, 'let us see what Liturgy of the Word we are going to have on that day'. What we looked at was when I would be free to do it, when the parish would be free to receive us, and whether there was going to be anything else going on in the parish hall. And yet, the good Lord gave us, as always, a very beautiful Word. We are embarking on the threshold of Christmas, speaking about the silence, the night, the intervention, the Word becoming flesh on earth, joining earth with heaven, and that we ought to remember as we said in the Responsorial Psalm, "*remember the marvels the Lord has done*".

And then, obviously, one of the things that the Church presents to us, both in the Season of Advent and also in the Season of Lent is prayer ... not to mention the conclusion of the Gospel "*And when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?*"

The Bible tells us that "*faith comes from hearing, and hearing the Word of God*". So it shows the importance of communicating with the Word of God. The same is the importance of prayer. It was about 4:00 o'clock this morning when I was reading the daily reflection of Bishop Robert Barron. He was reflecting about why God sometimes does not hear our prayers immediately. His conclusion was that God wants us to be prepared for the gifts that He is going to give us. If as soon as you ask for it, it is given to you, you don't appreciate it much, but when we have been waiting, waiting, waiting for it, then unconsciously we are preparing ourselves.

He concluded by saying that it is a matter of enlarging our hearts. Mother Teresa of Calcutta says that "prayer is the enlargement of the heart until it is capable of containing God's gift of Himself." So while we are praying, and repeating the prayer, our heart is being widened. We read in the Old Testament "*Jacob, widen yourself.*" Today

too in the reading we heard about the camp, the tent. It is interesting how these words, this terminology, is being presented to us in our life in order to prepare us, so like the desert, as soon as a drop of water falls on that dry land, it will be absorbed.

And perhaps this is why sometimes we have seen certain dryness, so that we do not take it for granted. We will be thirsting for it as Jesus Christ Himself told us "*He who tastes me will hunger for more.*" The Word of God is compared to water. I have said it many times that the way water travels from high places to low places, the same the Word of God resides in the heart of someone who is humble. Humility is a must.

So, in the first reading we see this wisdom in the silence. God-willing when we are downstairs for the Reflection, we will speak about the importance of silence. There are a couple of quotes from the book of Cardinal Sarah where he speaks about Carmelite Spirituality. He praises Carmelite Spirituality a lot because they emphasize silence. The title of the book is "The Power of Silence Against the Dictatorship of Noise".

In the Rule of St Albert (the Rule of Carmel), we have that expression from Isaiah "*In Silentium et Spe erit fortitudo vestra.*" "In silence and in hope shall be your strength." When looking back, why are we called to remember the marvels of the Lord. In every Eucharist we are called to do so. In English we call it **remember**, but in Hebrew, the word *zizakeron* does not mean remember exactly, it means "**remembrance**" "*Do this in remembrance of me.*"

In remembrance we look in the past, we rejoice in the present and look forward to the future with great Hope. Three elements .. Past .. Present .. Future. We do not know what the future holds BUT WE KNOW THE ONE WHO HOLDS OUR FUTURE. HE LOVES US UNCONDITIONALLY!!!

We look back in the past which will help us to understand the present. As Soren Kierkegaard says "History can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forward." So when we look back at the past, we do not look to stay there, but so that we will carry it into the present. We look back at the

past and we rejoice in the present, because as Jesus Christ told us *“Many wanted to see what you are seeing and to hear what you are hearing, but they did not see it.”* We rejoice because the Word of God is telling us to open our eyes *“Awake oh sleeper, now is the time of your salvation.”* It is saying that if we want to see the beauty of creation we have to walk through life with our eyes open otherwise we are going to take everything for granted. So when we look at the past we bring it in the present, we rejoice in the present and we look forward to the future with bright hope.

Why do we look forward to the future with bright hope? Because we are rejoicing in the present. We are experiencing God’s love here and now in the present. And when we experience God’s love, it becomes our guarantee for the future. As St Paul says in Romans chapter 5: *“And hope does not disappoint us because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”* This is the reason why, when look at the future we are not afraid of the future, even though we do not know what the future holds for each one of us. But, brothers and sisters, if we have experienced the present, we know that the one who holds our future is the one who loves us. He is the one who knows us *“Israel, there is hope for your future.”* He is the one who told us *“Israel, there is hope for your future.”* He is the one who told us *“My plans for you are plans of peace and not disaster.”*

And so when we are going to find ourselves celebrating the great Feast of Christmas, we will be able to hear the words of the Prince of Peace. The Gospel is called the Gospel of Peace. St Paul said to the Ephesians, *“Put on your feet the sandals of the Gospel of Peace.”* To put on our feet the sandals means to announce, to go and proclaim, to be heralds, to be evangelizers, to announce the good news of victory over death ... that is what it means.

To take off your sandals means to enter into death ... to put on your sandals means to announce resurrection, victory over death. Peter was in prison, in chains, waiting to die because Herod was going to kill him. First he killed James and it pleased the people that he killed James, now he is putting his hands on Peter. On the other side the

community, the church, is praying for the deliverance of Peter. And all of a sudden, in the night the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and when we are in meditation, surrounded with darkness, the Word of God can strike you and me, the way the Angel struck Peter. As soon as the Angel struck Peter the chains fell to the ground. You will notice that Peter does not have his sandals on. He knows he is preparing to die. And the Angel told him *“Put on your sandals and follow me.”* And as soon as Peter put on his sandals, the doors began to open by themselves, and Peter and the Angel are passing through those doors and no one talks to them, the guards do not stop them, they are not even noticed by anyone. And the same it is for you and for me, once we learn how to open our hearts so that the Word of God will be installed in there the way it was installed in Mary, then we begin to look at life from a different angle. Many times we look at life from the back, and so what do we do?

The Talmud has a saying “Where you stand depends what you see.” And then immediately after it says “What you see depends on where you stand.” If you are standing behind the tapestry you are not going to see the masterpiece from the front. But if you change, then you will say “Oh, I was standing in the wrong place. I was looking at it the wrong way. This is the proper angle to look at it.” The same angle that God looked at creation when he said “Behold it was very good”, not just good but “very good and beautiful.”

So the first reading comes to you and to me once more, continuing to emphasize the importance of wisdom. And as we heard last Sunday, if we want to have a grip on wisdom, it is not difficult to get. There are some conditions, first falling in love with it, the same with the Word of God. The second condition, you have delight in seeking it, and third condition is to wake up early to keep it. And if we wake up early to keep it, we will discover that she is already there waiting for us. My parents used to tell me when I was a young boy, when I did not want to go to bed early, they would say “early to bed, early to rise makes you healthy, wealthy and wise”. This was constantly said to me. And so it is with the book of Wisdom, it tells us to wake up early.

St Jerome states this clearly, that the Bible should be the key that opens the door of the morning and the key that closes the door for the night. As St Jerome says, “When life comes upon you let it find you with your head nodding on the pages of the Bible.” nodding on the pages of the Word of God. And then, when we do that, there is no fear of facing the night. There is no fear of going to sleep because our God does not sleep or slumber. He is going to keep watch over us.

Then the reading from the Gospel presents in front of us the importance of prayer.

Every Christian is obliged to pray. The fourth section of the Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks about the importance of prayer. It starts with a definition of prayer by St Thérèse. It does not use as an introduction the definition of St Teresa that we find in chapter 8 of The Book of Her Life, but it uses the definition of St Thérèse - “Prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.”

Sometimes people do not see the meaning in suffering, but there is meaning in suffering too. Suffering defines us until we are in a position to reflect God’s glory. We have heard it in Malachi. When the Messiah comes, He will sit as a refiner of silver. The refiner of silver knows when the silver is ready because he will see his face reflected in it. And so it is with us, God will continue to purify us, to clean us with His Word. You are clean because of the Words I told you until we reflect His glory. When will we reflect His glory? When His Word becomes flesh in us. “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.*”

When we open our hearts to receive God’s promises we will see them fulfilled one by one in our life, along the core of our life. And to see this happen we need persistence and endurance. “*Those who endure to the end, they will sit with me at the table that my Father has prepared for me since the foundation of the world.*”

Prayer is oil in the engine of life. To run the engine without oil is to burn it. Prayer is tuning in to the wavelength of God so that we will not hear a lot of

disturbances, but the voice will be clear, because prayer is a two-way traffic. When we read the Bible God speaks to us, when we pray we speak to God. The reading of the Bible and Prayer go hand in hand. Prayer will help us to learn the language because we do not know how to pray, but the Spirit comes to our rescue. It will teach us ... it gives us the courage to turn towards God and address Him as Father. And if God is our Father, as He is, then we look at Him to become for you and for me our Role Model.

We try to look at things the way He looks at things, and if we do so, like Him, we are going to experience that indeed creation is very beautiful, that indeed creation is very good. So today the Gospel comes to our rescue and tells us, as in Romans 12.12 in one sentence to shoot three shots at each one of us. “*Rejoice in your hope; be patient in tribulation; be constant in prayer.*” If we do these three things, then for sure Advent will be a life well lived, and Christmas will find us ready to enter into the Feast. Romans chapter 12; verse 12 ... “*Rejoice in your hope; be patient in tribulation; be constant in prayer.*” If we do that, then the Word of God will become flesh in us and we will be able to see His glory and reflect it to others.

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*Think good thoughts ...*

*Do good deeds ...*

*Everything else about you will be harmonized ...*

**IT IS THAT SIMPLE!!!**

*The world around you is in shambles — and you are probably no exception.*

*The chasm between what you should be and what you actually are is so vast, you cannot see yourself changing anything.*

***That’s His job.***

*Your job is to think good thoughts.*

*Your job is to do good deeds.*

God will make a bridge from your thoughts to your deeds and together they will become the most powerful instrument of change in the world!!!