

FRIDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT
MEMORIAL OF SAINT DAMASUS, POPE
MASS FOR THE DIRECTORS
SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE
LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN
DECEMBER 11, 2015

Is 48, 17-19
Ps 1, 1-2. 3. 4. 6
Mt 11, 16-19

HOMILY

Praised be Jesus Christ, now and for ever. Amen.

During the second week of our preparation for the great feast of the Birth of the Lord, Holy Mother Church invites us to contemplate the figure of Saint John the Baptist, the Last of the Prophets and the Herald of the Lord at His coming. Contemplating the vocation and mission of Saint John the Baptist, we are filled with immense gratitude and joy, for he announces to us the grace of our salvation in Christ: the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of eternal life. What is more, he teaches us how to dispose ourselves to receive the grace of salvation: repentance of our sins and reparation for them. He speaks to us not his own word but the “word of God”¹ which has come to him, and he announces what God has fulfilled for us: His promise of our eternal salvation.

As he himself understood, Saint John the Baptist was “a voice of one crying out in the desert”², preparing “the way of the Lord”³ Who has indeed come into the world by His Redemptive Incarnation. He announces the coming of the long-awaited Savior Who, conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit, suffered, died, rose from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father for our eternal salvation. He shows us Christ, our Savior, who is now seated in glory at the right hand of the Father and, from His place in glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit, never ceases to pour out in abundance, from His glorious pierced Heart, the gift of eternal life, the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit, into our hearts. Through the

¹ Lk 4, 2.

² Lk 4, 4.

³ Lk 4, 4.

mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation, the Lord teaches us all that is “for [our] good”; He leads us “on the way [we] should go.”⁴

We ask Saint John the Baptist to implore for us the grace to follow the Lord, as he inspires and bids us to do. We ask him to intercede for us, so that we may be obedient to the divine wisdom which leads us to Christ, the divine wisdom of which he is the faithful and tireless herald. Divine wisdom, as Our Lord reminds us in the Gospel, “is vindicated by her works.”⁵ We pray for the strength to resist the worldly reasoning of those who found a cause for rejecting both John the Herald and the Christ Whom he heralded. As we prayed in the Responsorial Psalm, may our delight be the “law of the LORD,” and may meditation upon it “day and night” be our way to an ever deeper love of God and of neighbor.

Alive in Christ, we experience daily the truth of the fulfillment of God’s promise, announced by John the Baptist:

Every valley shall be filled
and every mountain and hill shall be made low.
The winding roads shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.⁶

While we make our pilgrim way, in a world beset by ignorance, confusion, error and sin, to our true and final destiny of eternal life, Christ the Lord, through the power of the Holy Spirit, accompanies us, purifying our hearts of sin and inflaming them with His own love. Christ brings us safely to the lasting home which God the Father has prepared for us from all time, if only we turn away from our sins, if only we turn toward Him every day and give Him our hearts.⁷

Our Lady of Guadalupe visited our continent in 1531 to draw all men to the great mystery of God’s love which we celebrate in these days of Advent and will celebrate with great joy and peace on the day of His Birth at Bethlehem. She is present here, in her shrine, in a powerful way to draw us to Christ and to obedience to His Law which gives life and fosters love. Here, we hear always her words to the wine stewards at the Wedding Feast of Cana, words

⁴ Is 48, 17.

⁵ Mt 11, 19.

⁶ Lk 3, 5-6.

⁷ Cf. Jn 14, 2.

inscribed on the cornerstone of this church and, in their complete context, in the dome of this church: “Do whatever he tells you.”⁸

Today, we also celebrate the memory of Pope Saint Damasus who died in the year 384. He lived at a very difficult time in the life of the Church. Even his own election to the See of Saint Peter was bitterly contested. Saint Damasus, because of his own deep life of faith and prayer, understood that the only correct response to the difficulties of the time was to exercise the office of Roman Pontiff with total obedience to Christ Who is alive in the Apostolic Tradition. He heroically opposed a popular heresy which denied the humanity of Christ and had sadly gained credence, even among Bishops, at the Council of Rimini. He encouraged Saint Jerome to make a complete translation of the Holy Scriptures into Latin. He was also devoted to the Christian burial places, the catacombs, making them more accessible and writing many inscriptions for the tombs of the deceased faithful, especially of the martyrs. For instance, thanks to the inscription of Pope Damasus, we know Saint Tarcisus and his heroic care of the Blessed Sacrament.⁹ In short, Pope Damasus taught the truth of the Redemptive Incarnation and fought for it tirelessly. An epitaph which he wrote for himself reflects his own profound faith in Christ alive in the Church and alive in his own soul:

He who walking on the sea could calm the bitter waves, who gives life to the dying seeds of the earth; He who was able to loose the mortal chains of death; and after three days’ darkness could bring again to the upper world the brother for his sister Martha: He, I believe, will make Damasus rise again from the dust.¹⁰

Today’s Holy Mass is offered for the intention of the Board of Directors of the Shrine, asking God to bless them in their service of the Shrine and confiding their intentions to the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe and her heroic messenger, Saint Juan Diego. The Directors of the Shrine have the weighty responsibility of placing their personal gifts at the service of the mission of Our Lady which she carries out so faithfully and generously here. In your gratitude for their selfless service, please pray for them and for their intentions.

⁸ Jn 2, 5.

⁹ *Butler’s Lives of the Saints*, Complete Edition, eds. Herbert J. Thurston and Donald Attwater (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1956), Vol. IV, p. 537.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 538.

Let us now, with childlike humility and confidence, offer our hearts to the Lord, placing them completely into His glorious, pierced Heart through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. One with the Virgin Mother of God, with Pope Saint Damasus, and with all the saints, let us give our hearts completely to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through His Eucharistic Sacrifice. Resting our hearts in His Heart, we will receive the wisdom and strength to do all that God is asking of us. We will discover the extraordinary nature of our ordinary lives because Christ is alive and at work in our hearts. We will follow the counsel of His Immaculate Mother and ours: “Do whatever he tells you.”¹¹

I close with words of a prayer written by Dom Prosper Guéranger for the feast of Saint Damasus:

Holy Pontiff Damasus! during thy life on earth, thou wast the light, which guided the children of the Church; for thou didst teach them the mystery of the Incarnation, and didst guard them against those perfidious doctrines, wherewith hell ever strives to corrupt that glorious symbol of our faith, which tells us of God’s infinite mercy towards us, and of the sublime dignity of man thus mercifully redeemed. Seated on the Chair of Peter, thou didst confirm thy brethren, and thy faith failed not; for Jesus had prayed to His Father for thee.... Pray for us, that we may have light to see Him, and now Him, and love Him, under the humble guise in which He is so soon to appear to us.”¹²

*Heart of Jesus, formed by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, have mercy on us!
Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of America and Star of the New Evangelization, pray for us!
Pope Saint Damasus, pray for us!
Saint Juan Diego, pray for us!*

Raymond Leo Cardinal BURKE

¹¹ Jn 2, 5.

¹² Prosper Guéranger, *The Liturgical Year, Advent*, tr. Laurence Shepherd (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2000), pp. 442-443.