

MEMORIAL OF ST ALPHONSUS LIGUORI, BISHOP & DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH
MARIAN CATECHIST CONSECRATION WEEKEND
SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE, LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN
AUGUST 1, 2014

Rom 8, 1-4

Ps 119, 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14

Mt 5, 13-19

HOMILY

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

Each First Friday of the month, I offer the Holy Mass for the intentions of the members of the Marian Catechist Apostolate and for God's continued blessing upon the Apostolate. It pleases me very much that the First Friday of August occurs within our annual Consecration Weekend, so that you, the members of the Apostolate are present for the Holy Mass offered for your intentions. I express, too, my pleasure that the Consecration Weekend takes place at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the common home for the members of the Apostolate who carry out their service in so many different parts of the Church, especially of the Church in the United States.

The Apostolate is at home in every household which undertakes the home-study courses of the Servant of God Father John Anthony Hardon of the Society of Jesus, but it is at home in a special way here, for the very ground on which this Church of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe stands was blessed by the Servant of God before the ground was prepared for construction. Our beloved Father Hardon saw the then-future Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe as a point of reference for his beloved Marian Catechists whom he also placed under her guidance and protection as the patroness of the Apostolate. On this First Friday of the month, on which we honor the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, the glorious pierced Heart which God the Son first took under the Immaculate Heart of Mary, let us pray that we may all grow in a deeper knowledge of the word of Christ, handed down to us in the Church, and in a more ardent love of Him, giving ever more completely our hearts, one with the Immaculate Heart of Mary, into His Most Sacred Heart. Coming on pilgrimage to her Shrine at La Crosse, we ask the Mother of God, Our Lady of Guadalupe, to draw us ever nearer to her Divine Son, as she did for the wine-stewards at the Wedding Feast of Cana, making us ever more obedient to her maternal counsel: "Do whatever He tells you."¹

¹ Jn 2:5.

In the image of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus we contemplate the Mystery of Faith, the mystery of God's immeasurable and unceasing love of us. God our Father sent His only-begotten Son in our human flesh as the supreme act of His love. The Heart of God, the figurative image of His love found in the Old Testament,² became a human heart at the moment of the virginal conception of His only-begotten Son in the womb of the Virgin Mary. That same human heart was pierced by the spear of the Roman centurion after Christ had died on the Cross for us. From that same Heart, now glorious at the right hand of the Father, Our Lord never ceases to pour forth into our hearts the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit. From Christ's pierced side, there flowed blood and water as the sign of the unceasing flow of divine grace from His glorious Heart into the hearts of His disciples after His Resurrection from the Dead and His Ascension to the right hand of the Father.

The Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, stood at the foot of the Cross, one in heart with the Heart of Jesus. When His Heart was pierced, so, too, her Immaculate Heart was mystically pierced, in accord with her enduring mission of Mother of Divine Grace. As Marian Catechists, we strive to imitate the Mother of God, even as we daily call upon her intercession, so that our hearts may participate ever more fully in the pure and selfless love of the Most Sacred Heart, so that we, with Mary, may communicate to others the love of the Heart of Jesus. Mary draws our hearts to her own, so that she may lead us to give our hearts to Jesus, most especially by means of instructing others in the word of Christ or by offering prayers and sacrifices for all who are Marian Catechists. As Marian Catechists, we consecrate our minds and hearts to the Mind and Heart of Jesus under the direction and protection of the Mother of God Whom Christ has given to us as our Mother when He was dying upon the Cross.

Today, we also celebrate the memory of Saint Alphonsus Liguori, Bishop and Doctor of the Church. Regarding Saint Alphonsus, Dom Prosper Guéranger declared: "To this great saint, great in works and in doctrine, are directly applied these words of the Holy Ghost: *They that instruct many to justice shall shine as stars for all eternity.*"³ In a time of great confusion regarding the moral teaching of the Church, Saint Alphonsus held steadfastly to the word of Christ as it is handed down to us in the Church. He understood the meaning of the very word of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount:

Do not think that I have to abolish the law or the prophets.

² Cf. Dt 10, 15

³ Prosper Guéranger, *The Liturgical Year, Time after Pentecost, Book IV*, tr. The Benedictines of Stanbrook Abbey (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2000), p. 237. Cf. Dan 12, 3.

I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.

Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away,
not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter
will pass from the law, until things have taken place.

Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments
and teaches others to do so
will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven.

But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments
will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.⁴

Saint Alphonsus understood that Christ had come into the world, in order that He might win for us the grace to live according to God's law written upon every human heart and according to the laws which He gives to us in His holy Church for the sake of our growth in faith, hope, and love.

Christ did not come to advance either laxism or rigorism. He did not come to teach and promote an ideology of law. He came, rather, to give us the freedom which disposes us to cooperate with God's grace in all things. In fact, as the Gospel makes clear, Our Lord condemns those who would fail in their duty to obey the law and to teach it to others. Christ teaches us the justice which acknowledges our sins and, at the same time, trusts in God's never-failing mercy toward his children who confess their sins with true repentance.

Saint Paul, in the Letter to the Romans, helps us to deepen our reflection upon the relationship of law and freedom. He reminds us that it is sin in our lives which makes us weak before the demands of the law and enslaves us to itself. Christ, by His saving Passion and Death, has won for us the victory over sin, enabling us to obey the law in all things and thus to be free. Saint Paul declares:

For what the law, weakened by the flesh, was powerless to do,
this God has done:
by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh
and for the sake of sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,
so that the righteous decree of the law might be fulfilled in us,
who live not according to the flesh
but according to the spirit.⁵

⁴ Mt 5, 17-20.

⁵ Rom 8, 3-4.

Saint Alphonsus Liguori taught the virtue of justice which demands obedience to the law in service of God and of our neighbor, and, therefore, leads the sinner to seek pardon and to make reparation. Dom Guéranger comments:

Every deviation, whether towards rigour or weakness, offends the rectitude of justice; but, especially since Bethlehem and Calvary, no sin so wounds the divine Heart as distrust; no fault is unpardonable except in the despair of a Judas, saying, like Cain: *My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon.*⁶

Following the teaching of Saint Alphonsus Liguori, let us never presume to excuse lightly our sins and, at the same time, let us never despair of God's mercy and the help of His grace to forgive our sins, if only we repent and make reparation, and to set us once again upon the path of justice and charity.

Through the investiture with the Miraculous Medal, which takes place at the conclusion of the celebration of the Holy Mass, we express sorrow for our sins and, at the same time, with the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we express confidence in God's forgiveness. We pray through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, conceived without sin, that our hearts, like her Immaculate Heart, may be pure, may belong totally to the Heart of Jesus. The investiture with the Miraculous Medal expresses in a particularly strong manner our union of heart with the Immaculate Heart of Mary who draws us to place our hearts totally within the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus. Since the form of the Miraculous Medal was first revealed to Saint Catherine Labouré in 1830, many miracles have been associated with the wearing of the medal.⁷ The greatest miracle which devotion to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal brings about is the union of our hearts, through the intercession of Mary Immaculate, with the Sacred Heart of Jesus. For Marian Catechists, consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the devotion of the Miraculous Medal is especially important, as the Servant of God Father John Hardon, founder of the Marian Catechist Apostolate, always insisted.

Let us now lift up our hearts, one with the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus, upon which we gaze in the Most Blessed Sacrament. With the Immaculate Heart of Mary, let our hearts belong totally to Our Lord Jesus, so that He may purify, heal and strengthen them with His immeasurable and unceasing Divine Love. As we

⁶ Guéranger, pp. 238-239.

⁷ Cf. John A. Hardon, S.J., "Miraculous Medal," *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, 4th printing (Bardstown, KY: Eternal Life, 2008), p. 353.

unite our hearts to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, let us ask God's blessing, through the intercession of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, upon the time of the Consecration Weekend. Let us pray, in a special way, through the intercession of Saint Alphonsus Liguori, that the holy time of the Consecration Weekend will strengthen us in sorrow for our sins and in confidence in God's forgiveness, so that we may be true Marian Catechists, not only in word but even more so by example. Let us trust always more in the word of Christ to us as catechists: "But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven."⁸

Heart of Jesus, abode of justice and love, have mercy on us.

O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.

Saint Alphonsus Liguori, pray for us.

Saint Juan Diego, pray for us.

Raymond Leo Cardinal BURKE

⁸ Mt 5, 19.