

MEMORIAL OF POPE SAINT DAMASUS I
THURSDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT
SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE
LA CROSSE
DECEMBER 11, 2014

Is 41, 13-20
Mt 11, 11-15

HOMILY

Praised be Jesus Christ!

Throughout the Season of Advent, we ponder the great Mystery of Faith, the mystery of God's immeasurable and unceasing love of us, which has reached its fullness in the Redemptive Incarnation of God the Son. Today's readings lead us to ponder the state of injustice and, therefore, misery of a life without God. The Israelites are indeed miserable because of their rebellion against God and the good order which he has placed in all creation and has inscribed upon every human heart. Thinking themselves to be the masters of their lives, they sought their own gratification and power over nature and others, abandoning communion with God through prayer and worship. As a result, they violated the Ten Commandments to the destruction of themselves and of their society. The Prophet Isaiah refers them as "O worm Jacob, O maggot Israel."¹

But their rebellion and misery does not stop God from loving them all the more and calling them again and again to the conversion of their lives. God speaks to them through the Prophet Isaiah: "Fear not, I will help you."² No matter how far astray His people wandered, God never failed to pursue them and to draw them to Himself through the repentance of their sins and daily obedience to His life-giving Commandments. In the fullness of time, He came Himself to live with them and to give His life for them, so that they might live in Him always throughout their earthly pilgrimage, and finally and forever in the goal of their pilgrimage, the Kingdom of Heaven.

Our Lord Jesus underlies the wonder of God's love manifested by His coming into the world in today's Gospel. Saint John the Baptist was indeed the greatest among those born of

¹ Is 41, 14.

² Is 41, 13.

woman.³ He was the last of the Prophets and the Herald of the Redeemer at His Coming, and yet “the least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”⁴ In other words, Saint John the Baptist was the herald of the gift of victory over sin and the gift of divine grace, but he died before the victory had been won. While surely, as the Church has always proclaimed, he is a true hero of God, a saint, he did not enjoy the gift of life in the Church which even the poorest sinner enjoys through Baptism. Yet, as our Lord goes on to explain, Saint John the Baptist, by his heroic fidelity in preparing the way for our Lord’s coming into the world is our model in the daily battle against the forces of evil which would attempt to lead us once again into sin and rob us of divine grace, the pledge of our eternal glory.

Surely, in our time, we understand the meaning of the words of our Lord, with reference to the example of Saint John the Baptist: “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent are taking it by force.”⁵ In our time, the advance of the Kingdom of Heaven suffers intense violence at the hands of a world which is totally secularized. But we must trust in the invincible power of divine grace to win the victory of divine life and love in us and in our world. We, the Church Militant, must never hesitate to engage in the combat with the lies and corruption of the forces of evil and to defend the truth and love which comes to us always and in abundance from the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus, seated in glory at the right hand of the Father and alive for us in His holy Church. Through our holy violence, inspired and sustained by divine grace, the Kingdom of Heaven will be ours.

The devotion of Pope Saint Damasus to the holy martyrs and his care of their places of burial, which became places of pilgrimage for the faithful, help us to understand the meaning of holy violence. The martyrs teach us that we must be prepared to suffer whatever may come in our faithful love of our Lord. Our resistance to the enemies of Christ and of His Church may require us to suffer violence of various kinds, but we, like the martyrs, must remain humbly confident of the victory which Christ alive in us unfailingly wins.

Today, we pray especially for the Members and Directors of this sacred place of pilgrimage in which pilgrims find strong grace for the daily conversion of their lives to God and for the battle against the forces of darkness in our time. The Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe here, while fully recognized and blessed by the Church, is an independent apostolate, that is, it is not part of any other Church structure or corporation. For that reason,

³ Cf. Mt 11, 11.

⁴ Mt 11, 11.

⁵ Mt 11, 12.

the Members and the Directors bear a particularly heavy burden of responsibility for the present operation of the Shrine and for its future. While the entire Board of Directors meets twice annually, on the day before the Solemnity of the Dedication of the Church and on the day before the Solemnity of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Members and Directors work throughout the year, especially through the Committees of the Board of Directors, for the good of the Shrine. Please keep the Members and Directors in your prayers, that they may fulfill faithfully and generously their sacred responsibility for the benefit of countless pilgrims.

After the Postcommunion, I will conduct the Knighting Ceremony for Andrew Hegland who has been working for several years, under the direction of Brother Joseph, so that he might present himself today to become Our Lady's Knight of the Altar. Let us thank God for the gifts of His grace at work in Andrew, drawing him to an ever deeper dedication to the Sacred Liturgy. At the same time, let us pray for him that his devotion may continue to increase and express itself in the uprightness of his moral conduct, especially in the midst of a morally corrupted culture. I take the occasion to thank Brother Joseph for his tireless labors in preparing worthy ministers of the altar for our Shrine.

Filled with wonder at the Mystery of Faith, the mystery of God's immeasurable and unceasing love of us, which we are about to witness in the making present of the Sacrifice of Calvary, let us lift up our hearts, one with the Immaculate Heart of Our Lady and Our Mother, to the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus. Resting our hearts in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, they will be cleansed of sin and filled with divine grace for the heroic love of God and our neighbor which we witness in the lives of the martyrs to whom Pope Saint Damasus was so fully devoted.

*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