

Votive Mass of Our Lady on Saturday
Church of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe
La Crosse, Wisconsin
31 October 2020

Eccli 24, 14-16 (Sir 24, 9-12)
Lk 11, 27-28

Sermon

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

Celebrating the Votive Mass of Our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary, we rejoice in the perfect union of her Immaculate Heart with the Most Sacred Heart of her Divine Son. From the moment of her conception, Mary's heart was preserved from every stain of sin, so that she would be prepared to conceive God the Son in her womb at His coming into the world to save us from our sins. By God's special favor, she shared beforehand in the grace of the salvation which her Divine Son would win for us by His Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension. She was always totally for Christ.

For that reason, the Church has found in the inspired text of the Book of Ecclesiasticus or Sirach, which applies principally to Christ, the Wisdom or Logos of God the Father, the fitting expression of her participation in the Redemptive Incarnation of God the Son. From all time, God had chosen Mary to be the Mother of His only-begotten Son at His coming in our human flesh: "From the beginning, and before the world, was I created, and unto the world to come I shall not cease to be, and in the holy dwelling place I have ministered before him."¹

Likewise for all eternity, from the moment of her glorious Assumption into heaven, she remains "the handmaid of the Lord,"² serving Our Lord faithfully in the Church for the salvation of man. By God's all-merciful plan for our eternal salvation He has given us the Virgin Mother of God as the Mother of Divine Grace: "And I took root in an honourable people, and in the portion of my God his inheritance, and my abode is in the full assembly of the saints."³ The Immaculate Heart of Mary is unceasingly drawing our hearts to her own, so that we who, at our baptism, received the vocation to be saints, may place our hearts completely into the glorious pierced Heart of Our Lord.

¹ Eccl 24, 14 (Sir 24, 9).

² Lk 1, 38.

³ Eccl 24, 16 (Sir 24, 12).

Pope Saint John Paul II, in a visit to the Shrine of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary at Pompei in Italy on October 21, 1979, provided us with a wonderful instruction on the great mysteries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which illuminate for us the Mystery of Faith, the Mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation. He taught us with these words:

The mission of this Son, the eternal Word, begins then, when Mary of Nazareth, a “virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David” (Lk. 1:27), on hearing these words of Gabriel, answers: “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Lk. 1:38). The Son’s mission on earth begins at that moment. ... The Son’s mission begins in her, under her heart. The mission of the Holy Spirit, who “proceeds from the Father and from the Son” arrives first, too, at her, at the soul that is His Bride, the most pure and the most sensitive.⁴

At the Annunciation, God the Son took a human heart, His Sacred Heart, in the Virgin Mary’s womb, under her Immaculate Heart. At the moment of the Archangel Gabriel’s announcement, Mary became the Mother of God Incarnate, and, at the same time, His first and best disciple. Thus, when the people praised His Mother, Our Lord, referring to the perfection of her discipleship, responded: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”⁵

Mary was one in heart with Her Divine Son. She who had conceived Him by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit and had brought Him into the world, would continue to participate, in a singular way in His saving mission, for her heart was perfectly united to the Heart of Jesus. At the foot of the Cross, her Immaculate Heart was mystically pierced at the piercing of the Heart of Jesus by the spear of the Roman centurion. At her death, Our Lord assumed her – body and soul – into Heaven and crowned her Queen of Heaven and Earth, so that she might continue to be the Mother of Divine Grace which flows, without measure and without cease, from the glorious pierced Heart of her Divine Son.

⁴ “La missione di questo Figlio, Verbo eterno, inizia allora, quando Maria di Nazaret, Vergine «promessa sposa di un uomo della casa di Davide, chiamato Giuseppe», ascoltando queste parole di Gabriele, risponde: «Eccomi, sono la serva del Signore, avvenga di me quello che hai detto». In quel momento inizia la missione del Figlio sulla terra...

La missione del Figlio inizia in Lei, sotto il Suo cuore. La missione dello Spirito Santo, che «procede dal Padre e dal Figlio», giunge pure prima a Lei, all’anima che è la Sua Sposa, la più pura e la più sensibile.” *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, Vol. II, 2 (1979) (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1980), p. 814, n. 1. English translation: *Osservatore Romano English Edition*, n. 610, p. 3.

⁵ Lk 11, 28.

Our Blessed Mother, drawing our hearts to her Immaculate Heart, leads us to reflect more deeply upon our relationship with Christ, the God the Son and her Son, in the Church. Today, in a most special way, our Blessed Mother reminds us that the relationship of faithful and enduring love, which Christ has formed with us through Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist, is the greatest treasure in our lives. There is nothing that can be more important to us. Everything else in our lives is only good to the degree that it serves communion with Christ in our daily living.

The greatest blessing of our lives is not some material good or worldly success but the revelation of the “mysteries of the kingdom,” which God the Father has made to us, His “little ones,” through the Redemptive Incarnation of His only-begotten Son.⁶ His Son, Divine Wisdom Incarnate Who, from all eternity, has ever been at the right hand of the Father,⁷ leads us into an ever deeper understanding and love of the great Mystery of Faith, unveiled in the many mysteries taught to us by our faith. It is these mysteries which the Blessed Virgin Mary always “kept ... in her heart”⁸ and which she teaches her children to keep in their hearts.

When we truly treasure the great gift of God’s immeasurable and ceaseless love of us in Our Lord Jesus Christ, that is, the Mystery of Faith, we, “out of joy,” gladly order everything else in our lives to respond fittingly to the incomparable treasure which is God’s love. One in heart with the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we give our hearts to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We follow always the maternal counsel of the Virgin Mother of God, given to the wine stewards at the Wedding Feast at Cana: “Do whatever he tells you.”⁹

The Wuhan virus, which has disrupted everyone’s life and has caused intense suffering and even death for some, has also been a test of our faith. Yes, the illness itself is an evil against which we must take all reasonable precautions. But what is even more serious is the irrational fear, cultivated by certain powerful forces in the world, especially through the mass media, leading us to view the virus as the interpretative key to our daily living. These forces have been telling us now for some time that we need to reset our lives in terms of the Wuhan virus.

The forces in question, which are not easy to identify, are totally secular. Their approach to the illness and their idea of how our lives now need to be completely redirected have nothing to do with faith in God. They have nothing to do with God Who has sent His only-begotten Son in our human flesh, through the Divine Maternity of the Blessed Virgin

⁶ Mt 11, 25.

⁷ Cf. Sir 24, 9-10.

⁸ Lk 2, 51.

⁹ Jn 2, 5.

Mary, to save us from every evil. For these forces, our life of faith in the Church has no important part to play in dealing with the evil which besets us. But Christ is the interpretative key to the present crisis as He is to every serious illness and every other evil which besets us as a result of original sin.

Christians throughout the centuries have had to deal with crises like the Wuhan virus by following the teaching of the Sacred Scriptures and Sacred Tradition and, above all, by turning to God in the Sacraments and through prayer and devotions. In dealing with such a crisis, they have heard the voice of Our Lord Who tells us to set aside our fear and to have faith in Him. His Virgin Mother assists us to overcome fear and to live in faith. In the most important moments of our lives, she takes us to Him, as she does so powerfully in this holy place of pilgrimage, giving us the instruction: "Do whatever He tells you." It is not by chance that these very words are inscribed on the cornerstone of this Shrine Church. At a time like the present, the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe shows us the way to respond truthfully, with Christ-like love, to the crises we are facing.

Privileged to participate in the Solemn Pontifical Mass, in all of the richness of beauty of the More Ancient Usage (the *Usus Antiquior*) of the Roman Rite, we are led, by the Virgin Mother of God, to her Divine Son. The richness of the beauty of the Sacred Liturgy manifests to us the reality of the descent of the glorious Christ from His place at the right hand of the Father to come to us, by sacramental signs, to heal us and to lead us to eternal life. Drawing our hearts to her Immaculate Heart, the Blessed Virgin Mary teaches us that nothing can be more important to us than the gift of God's love, immeasurable and unceasing, which destines us for eternal life with Him, in the company of the angels and of all the saints. She teaches us to consider every aspect of our daily living within the context of the Mystery of Faith, in which we participate most perfectly through the Holy Mass. She helps us to experience the mystery of God's pure and selfless love, faithful and enduring "to the end."¹⁰ She counsels us to engage the challenges of our daily lives always with reference to Christ and to His life with us in the Church.

Let us now lift up our hearts, one with the Immaculate Heart of Mary, our Blessed Mother, to the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus, ever open to receive our hearts, to heal them with His saving mercy and to inflame them with His pure and selfless love. Let us give our hearts completely into the Heart of Jesus. May we, one in heart with the Immaculate Heart of Mary, keep in our hearts always the great mysteries of our salvation which we are privileged

¹⁰ Jn 13, 1.

to witness today, in which we are privileged to participate in the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ of which we are living members.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Raymond Leo Cardinal BURKE