

“Contemplating the Mysteries of our Lord for Bearing the Fruit of Evangelization” Talk for the Archdiocese of San Francisco Rosary Rally (2016)

Introduction

Last Sunday in the Archdiocese of Rouen in France, Archbishop Dominique Lebrun celebrated a special Mass of purification of the church where the 85-year-old priest, Fr. Jacques Hamel, was knifed to death at the altar by Islamist jihadists. At the Mass of purification Archbishop Lebrun announced that Pope Francis set aside the normal five-year period imposed after someone’s death before the process of beatification can begin.

Pope Francis had already spoken of the priest as a martyr, and the Archbishop explained that His Holiness did this in order to attain the testimony of (as he put it) “fresh witnesses.” He said that such witnesses “are those who have seen the people,” and that, “After a little bit of time, some die, some lose their memory.”

Learning the Person of Jesus Christ

Still fresh in our memory is the witness of the first Christian martyr in the land of ancient Christian origin since the early centuries of the Church. And Pope Francis’ decision can certainly help in the accurate instruction of Fr. Hamel’s cause for beatification. Indeed, if you were to write a biography of someone, you would want to interview the eyewitnesses of their deeds, as well as read carefully whatever they wrote. You would want to learn as much as you could from those who were closest to your subject – a spouse, a parent, a lifelong friend. When it comes to Jesus Christ, we do not simply want to learn facts about his life; we want to learn *him* (*RVM*, 14). Who was closer to Jesus than Mary? To pray the Rosary is to look at Jesus through her eyes, to see him through the lens of her faith and love.

This is a truth reflected in Scripture. St. Luke describes Mary as “pondering” the events of Christ, learning them “by heart.” She is not content with the outward incident; she wants to learn the inward reality. St. Luke mentions the heart of Mary three times, and these three occasions can be associated with our meditation on the traditional three sets of mysteries of the Rosary. Joyful: after the birth of Jesus, the angels sing glory to God, and the shepherds come to pay homage to the newborn Child. St. Luke tells us: “Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart” (Lk 2:19). Sorrowful: Mary and Joseph bring the Infant into the Temple. This is the fourth joyful mystery, but already here the shadow of the Cross appears; Simeon proclaims that Jesus is a sign which will be opposed, and that Mary will share in this rejection. St. Luke tells us: “A sword will pierce your heart, too” (Lk 2:35). Glorious: having lost their Son, Mary and Joseph find him in his Father’s house on the third day. Here we have an anticipation of the glorious mysteries: years later the Father will raise His Son Jesus from the dead on the third day. St. Luke tells us: “His mother meanwhile kept all these things in her heart” (Lk 2:51).

Contemplation and Discipleship

So it is that in the Gospel of St. Luke we are told that Mary constantly and deeply pondered the meaning of the events in the life of her Son in her heart. When we pray the Rosary, then, we are privileged to enter into Mary’s heart and to contemplate Christ with her. Yes, pondering the mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ is what we do with our Blessed Mother when we pray the Rosary, and for centuries countless Catholics have found the Rosary to be an effective means for contemplating the mysteries of the life of Christ in company with Mary, his

Mother. But to contemplate the mysteries of Christ means far more than learning lessons from the example of his life. It means living those mysteries in our own life, a communion with him which is only possible as the *fruit* of contemplation: prayer is the necessary pre-disposition to discipleship.

The Mother of our Lord is our model of contemplative prayer, but she is also the model *par excellence* of evangelization, that evangelization which is the hallmark of a faithful and active disciple of her Son. When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she was to give human birth to the eternal Son of the Father, what did she do? Imagine her situation: a young virgin, receiving such extraordinary – indeed, supernatural – news, perplexing news, and even disturbing news, who would have believed her? It would have been a very natural reaction for her to withdraw into seclusion for nine months to contemplate the miracle taking place within her womb. No one would have faulted her for that. But no; instead, we are told that as soon as the angel left her Mary set out “in haste” to visit her cousin Elizabeth, and as soon as she entered Elizabeth’s house the unborn John the Baptist leapt for joy in his mother’s womb. Decades before Jesus was to begin his public ministry, and before he was to send out his Apostles to preach the Good News, Mary was bringing the unborn “Good News” to a waiting world. This is why it is fitting that she is hailed as the “Star of the New Evangelization,” sharing the light of her faith with a world enshrouded in the darkness of war, materialism and despair.

Conclusion

The martyrs of all the ages – and now, very close to home, Fr. Jacques Hamel – shine the light of Mary’s faith for those dwelling in darkness and the shadow of death. They are the red martyrs who participate with our Mother in her spiritual martyrdom, perfectly united with her Son, our Lord, in his Passion and death, so as to be joined with him in his Resurrection. May our praying of the Holy Rosary lead us to contemplate with greater depth and fervor the mysteries manifest in our Lord’s earthly life, so that we may bear witness to him by our holiness of life, after the manner of our Blessed Mother Mary and all the martyrs, for the glory of God and the proclamation of the Good News of salvation.