

“The Christian Journey: Passage from the Fear of Darkness into Light”

Homily - V Encuentro Mass

Votive Mass of the Virgin Mary, Source of Life and Light

Introduction

According to our cherished tradition in the Church, we offer this Mass on Saturday in veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We offer the Votive Mass, “Holy Mary, Fountain of Light and Life.”

The baptism

This Votive Mass is particularly indicated during this Easter season: the very title of the Mass refers to Baptism. Baptism is the sacrament that gives life, takes away sin. We heard in the first reading that those who heard the proclamation from Saint Peter on the day of Pentecost “asked Peter and the other apostles: ‘What are we to do, my brothers?’ Peter said to them: Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Now, sin leads to death, and the Spirit gives life, the divine life within us. Remember how in creation God breathed into Adam’s nose, giving him life, the life that is His Spirit.

Baptism also gives us the light of Christ. That is why from ancient times this sacrament is also called the sacrament of “enlightenment,” that is, it allows us to see things in a new light, walking in the light of Christ, able to know and understand the deepest realities of life that before – in the darkness – it was not possible for us to know.

Now, the Virgin Mary is a symbol of that source of Baptism: as the Opening Prayer for our Mass says, “... from the chaste womb of the baptismal font the Church, our mother, has given to the children of this earth a new birth as children of heaven.” In the Preface, at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, we will pray that God “... decreed that the mysteries accomplished already in the Blessed Virgin should be accomplished in sign through the sacraments of the

Church: for from the baptismal font the Church brings to birth new sons and daughters conceived in fruitful virginity through faith and the Holy Spirit...”

The Christian Journey

Now, as an example of the opposite we have the figure of Nicodemus. Saint John in his Gospel is very particular, and he gives us this detail: he says that Nicodemus went to see Jesus *at night – at night* because he still did not know Jesus. Yes, he knew things *about* Jesus. For example, he recognizes his great works; as the Gospel mentions, Nicodemus says, “... no one can do these signs that you are doing unless God is with that person.” And he gives Jesus the title of “Rabbi,” a title of great respect.

Yes, he knew things about Jesus, but he did not *know Jesus* – he was still in the darkness, because he did not have the opportunity to meet Jesus personally. But finally he did – after this meeting, Nicodemus becomes a disciple, because now he knows Jesus personally, after this encounter.

And the same happens with us: if we know things about Jesus, but we do not know Jesus, we also remain in darkness.

Consider what it is to be in the dark: it means uncertainty, everything is unknown – fear of being vulnerable, that is, there might be something that can hurt you which is not possible for you to see or to know in advance and so protect yourself. So, being in the dark means fear. Fear is the intimidation that one feels in front of a serious threat, of a possible serious harm to which one does not have the adequate resources to defend oneself.

This is not the disposition of a disciple of Jesus Christ. The disposition, or attitude, of a disciple is not fear in the sense of intimidation, but fear in the sense of awe, the awe of God. We do not talk about “intimidation of God,” right? Fear of God in the sense of awe is something completely different! Unlike intimidation, holy fear means recognizing God’s dominion over our life, the ability to appreciate His greatness and holiness; it is characterized by the sense of the sacred.

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Love cannot exist with intimidation, but with awe, yes: perfect love removes all fear, and fills the believer with sensitivity to the sacred and with love of God for His holiness, and the desire to imitate it. Actually, the Christian journey is the passage, or maybe better the pilgrimage, from fear to awe and from knowing to encountering – from knowing things about Jesus to *knowing Jesus*.

Now, I have to say it very clearly: study of the faith is very important, it is very important; in fact, study of the faith is absolutely necessary to know Jesus, you cannot know him without it. But the thing is, by itself, study of the faith is insufficient, nor is it the most important thing. You cannot know Jesus without personal familiarity. Therefore, prayer is also needed, and needed above all else: prayer is the most important thing; and then putting it all into practice through our vocation, through which we live the demands of the Gospel in our lives, in very concrete ways in our day-to-day life. We must also commit ourselves to doing good works – the works of justice and charity.

Discipleship

All this – prayer, study, good works – is necessary to move out of the darkness and walk in the light of Christ with the holy fear of God. But there is one more thing, for which we are here this weekend: the call to spread this light!

Sadly, there is a lot of fear in the world today because of violence. There is a lot of violence: terrorism in the world, and more and more violence in our communities, tragically sometimes even in our own families. There is fear because of the power that society has over our lives, and particularly the government: the threats of being punished for living according to the values and principles of our faith to the full; threats to families, and the danger of separation of families, especially by the application of certain policies of the government.

All of this, and even more, yes, they are causes of fear – the fear that is lack of awe. It seems a contradiction, perhaps even a little silly, but the one who understands, understands well, that the one who is afraid – in the sense of holy fear – is not afraid of anything! He is the one

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who knows Jesus and lives in his light – it is a great grace, and no force of this world can take it away from him.

This is the Good News, and it is up to us to share it with those who still live in darkness, full of fear. Jesus relies on us to be the means for others to meet him – that’s why we’re here, is not it? This is a meeting, an encounter – the Fifth Encounter. Yes, it is an encounter with one another, and it is a great joy for all of us to be together here. But it is in order to encounter Jesus, so that we may be able to lead others to this encounter of grace and joy.

The Virgin Helps Us

And we can have confidence because we have the Blessed Virgin Mary – she is always with us to help us. At a certain moment in history she was the source of light and life – light and life that is her Son – when through her he became man, he took on our poor human flesh.

But it does not end there: she is always with us, now helping us from heaven. What she did once physically in history she continues to do for her children spiritually from heaven. Therefore, brothers and sisters, let us trust in her: in her help, in her intercession, in her maternal love. She will never disappoint us. She will always keep us in the light of her divine Son, so that we can be instruments of that peace for others. Instruments of his light and his joy.

Conclusion

It is she who accompanies us to the final, total and perfect encounter with her Son, where all fear is conquered and cast out, so that we may share the life of glory with him for all eternity.

Amen.