

Feast of Saint John of Capistrano
Wednesday, 23 October 2019
2 Cor 5:14-20; Lk 9:57-62

It would seem that we live in a bit of a confusing time for the Church. For the first time in almost 800 years we have a pope, and a “pope emeritus”. We have synod taking place that appears to divide us. We’ve got statues that some call idols, and some call important cultural symbols being stolen from churches and thrown into the Tiber. We have congregations that are rapidly dwindling specifically in the part of our country we’re called to serve. And of those who stay, it’s said that roughly 2/3rd of them don’t even believe in the real presence of the Eucharist...the source and summit of our faith. These are crazy times we are being called to serve in.

But there have been crazy times before, and St. John of Capistrano was born into one of them. He was born in the 14th century, 1386 to be exact. It was a time when one-third of the population, including 40% of the clergy were wiped out by plague. It was a time when the Church was split by the Western Schism, not with one active and one retired pope, but rather two separate men claiming the authority of the chair of St. Peter. That number would grow to three not long into the next century. The 100 years war was raging between two great Catholic nations of England and France. Italian city states were also constantly battling each other. So throughout Christendom, death and destruction was rampant. The Ottoman Turks, were winning many battles and expanding into Christian Europe. And finally, one of the great religious orders of the Church, the

Franciscans, founded by St. Francis to respond to God's call to rebuild His Church, was bitterly divided into opposing camps.

This was the state of the Church and the world that St. John of Capistrano was born and raised into. And how did he respond? Did he look around in despair? Did he look back at the "good old days" that were left behind? No. He only looked forward. He allowed the love of Christ to impel him, as it did St. Paul, and he plunged forward. He let the love of Christ drive him into the breach, into the dark mess that was the world and shined the light of Christ in it. He entered the Franciscans, despite the bitter divisions and worked to heal it. He worked to find the middle ground between the overly austere and the overly relaxed. He preached energetically and successfully throughout eastern Europe against many heresies that popped up. Finally, at age 70, after the Turks had captured Constantinople in 1453, the Holy Father asked St. John to preach a crusade for the defense of Europe. Not only did he preach, but he lead. He marched at the head of 70,000 Christian soldiers and lead them to victory at the battle of Belgrade, dying shortly after due to disease in the camps. Hence, St. John is the patron saint of military chaplains.

Not too bad I'd say. St John is a great example to all of us called to be priests of Jesus Christ. To quote the saint himself, "Those who are called to the table of the Lord must glow with the brightness that comes from the good example of a praiseworthy and blameless life...clerics must let their light shine before men...for a light does not illumine itself, but instead diffuses its rays and shines all around upon everything that comes into its view." Let us take the example of St. John of

Capistrano, let his reflection of the light of Christ inspire us to go out into the dark recesses of our world. Let that same love of Christ that drove him also impel us towards not only lives of holiness for ourselves, but also for the many souls placed into our care. And let us always remember, that no matter how dark or confusing the world seems around us, the light of Christ will always shine brighter.