

**Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity**  
**September 16, 2018**  
**Homily for the Anglican Usage Mass**  
**of the**  
**St. Thomas More Catholic Parish**  
**celebrated at**  
**St. Joseph Catholic Church**  
**Scranton, PA**  
**Mark 8:27-35**

I spoke last week about the Battle of Vienna and the significance for the Church of September 12<sup>th</sup>, how King John Sobieski's act of placing his army under the protection of our Blessed Mother that day issued in Blessed Innocent XI declaring that henceforth the Feast of the Holy Name of Mary would commemorate the victory won. I learned after preaching that homily that many people did not know how important September 12, 1683, is in the history of the Church; and one person actually asked me, "Does anyone know this?" I answered him, "The Viennese do."

In the same way we have war memorials for battles fought right here in Northeastern PA, Vienna is dotted with memorial plaques that remember Sobieski's heroics and pay tribute to the sacrifice made by the defenders of Vienna. This is something we understand intuitively, as sacrifices made on behalf of one's nation are worthy of memorials; and they foster a healthy patriotism, especially when they remind us what might have been had those sacrifices not been made. As I mentioned last week, in Vienna they know. Prior to the beginning of their siege of Vienna on July 14, the Ottoman army besieged Perchtoldsdorf, a village on the approach to Vienna. After they surrendered, despite assurance of terms, the entire Austrian garrison was slaughtered. To celebrate the sacrifices of the Viennese defenders is to celebrate the defense of innocent human life.

Our Gospel this morning encourages us to see sacrifices made on behalf of the Church in the same way. Jesus tells us, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." The same sacrifices we readily make to preserve our temporal goods we must also make to advance spiritual goods.

For example, the defenders of Vienna preserved Austria from suffering under Muslim domination, which meant their rights to life, liberty and property still obtained after the battle as they had before. It also meant that Austrian families were not subject to the Ottoman practice called *devshirme*, whereby Christian boys were taken by the state, forcibly converted to Islam and then made to serve as soldiers against their own people. These are all temporal goods we want to preserve, and it is no wonder we might memorialize through various monuments the soldiers who saved us from suffering such domination.

But our Lord wants us to view sacrifice through the prism of the soul. We recall hearing about children kidnapped at age seven and separated from their parents for life, and if their parents ever did see them again, it would be as soldiers sent in an army to oppress them. That is certainly tragic, and it happened in Ottoman lands more times than historians can count. What is even more tragic, however, is the loss of souls. How many of those boys' souls were lost, because they were stolen from their Christian families? It's bad enough that they were kidnapped. It's for worse to contemplate that upon judgment they may have gone to hell, deprived as they were for most of their lives of the wisdom of the Church and the means of grace. We flock to join armies to prevent temporal loss and, sometimes, rightly so. We

need to flock in the same way to prevent spiritual loss, to work against the damnation of those made in God's image, people for whom Christ died.

I think it is fair to say that monuments to such sacrifice are not nearly as common as they should be. We have the shrines of the saints; and for the past ten years we have taken our young people to visit those sites, to pray before their relics, and to teach our children about the fruits of a life lived well. We have learned how people devoted to the salvation of souls have changed the world, and we are grateful that these memorials exist. Nevertheless, there should be more of them.

After all, we are engaged in spiritual warfare. Just as the Ottomans wanted the lands, the property and the lives of the Viennese, the evil one desires our souls. However much we might celebrate Sobieski for rescuing Vienna, we should celebrate even more their spiritual fathers who got them out of hell. In other words, imagine if saints' shrines were as ubiquitous as war memorials, if we as a people valued our souls as much as we do our temporal goods.

Ironically, the way that we rectify this imbalance is not by building more shrines, so that they are equal in number to war memorials. The way we make up for this imbalance is by making more saints. We have to sign up for the spiritual battle with the same gusto as the English signed up for World War I in 1914. But we aren't going to make the world safe for democracy; we're going to make souls safe from hell. Our recruiting offices are churches, Catholic parishes, but we don't have to wait for recruits to wander in here. We have the advantage of going out to meet our recruits where they are.

The training we need for the salvation of souls is different, as well. What we need most is a desire for holiness, which will issue in the charity about which Jesus spoke in today's Gospel. When we desire to imitate God, we will see that purity's fruit is the life of self-sacrifice exemplified in the cross of Jesus Christ. This is what we have seen over and over again in our pilgrimages to the shrines of the saints, from the North American Martyrs in upstate New York to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton down south. If we want to win them for Christ and help preserve their souls, our lives truly must be a reflection of Jesus' own.

King John Sobieski and his troops would have had no hope of victory if they had not been ready to lay down everything to win. And indeed, more than a thousand of those men were killed. Our fight at this moment in history is even more momentous than the one that took place outside Vienna 335 years ago. If we hope to win, we're going to have to lay down everything, too.