

## Homily Notes for Presider at Holy Hour for Life and Liberty

*[Homily notes referencing the Mass readings are specific to October 20, but the biographical information on the three new American saints may be used throughout the Year of Faith.]*

Two passages from today's Mass readings are well-suited to the intentions of this Holy Hour.

First, the Psalmist speaks of his wonder that God, who created all things in the heavens and on earth, would raise men and women to an exalted place in his creation, empowering us to rule over all things of the earth. He writes:

“When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and stars that you set in place—  
What is man that you are mindful of him,  
and a son of man that you care for him?  
Yet you have made him little less than a god,  
crowned him with glory and honor.  
You have given him rule over the works of your hands,  
put all things at his feet” (Ps 8:4-7).

Human beings are the only creatures whom God has made in his own image. We are unique in all creation—a unity of soul and body, we are both mortal and immortal. While lesser animals act on instinct, and some on learned experience, we have a capacity to reason, a conscience, and a free will which enable us to choose what we believe and what actions we will take.

God's never-ending love for every human being and the price Jesus paid to ransom our souls through his suffering and death are the source of human dignity, the reason every human life is sacred and inviolable. God gave us free will so that we, his children, could choose to love, serve and obey him—not as puppets or even servants, but as free men and women. No human government may rightly infringe on a person's right and duty to both profess his faith and live according to his faith, in obedience to God's commands.

In Luke's Gospel, we hear Jesus' admonition:

“I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others  
the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God.  
But whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God.” (Lk 12:8-9)

We have the freedom to choose whether or not to acknowledge Christ's kingship and to obey God's holy will out of love. We can deny the faith and reject his commandments, but our choice will have eternal consequences. In recent decades and throughout the western world, we've witnessed a gradual turning away from belief and from reliance on God. This trend has been accompanied by the spread of moral relativism and an aggressive form of secularism that seeks to rid public life of all references to God and faith. In the past several years, federal agencies and some state and local governments have gone even further—forcing religious institutions and private employers to either act in violation of their beliefs and rights of conscience or close their doors. If Catholics and Christians fail to defend our God-given rights of religious liberty and freedom of conscience, we risk losing them for ourselves and generations to come.

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### **Brief biographical notes on three new American saints—**

Each of the new American saints (to be) canonized this year by Pope Benedict XVI were extraordinary witnesses to the faith. Each freely chose to embrace the radical demands of discipleship, bringing the Gospel of God's love to the poor, the outcast and to pagan peoples. They defended the dignity and the religious freedom of others at great cost to themselves.

Pedro Calungsod, a Filipino boy educated by Jesuits, at age 14 had already shown such zeal and ability as a catechist that missionaries invited him to go with them to the Mariana Islands. Pedro and Bl. Diego Luis de San Vitores went to Guam, where they converted many Chamorros to Catholicism, including the wife of a village chief, Mata'pang. The pagan chief did not hide his hostility toward them and toward those who accepted the faith. At the wife's request, the missionaries went to baptize her newborn daughter. In his fury, Mata'pang goaded a pagan villager into killing both missionaries. St. Pedro Calungsod was only 17 or 18 at the time of his martyrdom.

Kateri Tekakwitha was four when smallpox swept through the Mohawk village of Ossernenon (now Auriesville, NY), killing her parents and baby brother. The disease left her severely pockmarked, half-blind and lame. When she was 11, missionaries were able to return to her village—where three of their predecessors had been martyred—and instruct her in the faith. Her pagan uncle, in whose home she lived, strongly opposed her conversion and tried to force her into marriage to a pagan. She desired instead to remain a virgin. Her uncle confined her to the village, and she was denied food for refusing to work on Sundays. A young Mohawk even threatened to kill her if she didn't renounce her faith. She eventually escaped to the Mission of St. Francis Xavier in Kahnawake, Quebec. There she was baptized and made a vow of chastity. For the remainder of her life, she devoted herself to prayer and acts of charity.

Mother Marianne Cope, OSF worked as a teacher and school principal in Syracuse, NY and later helped found and run Catholic hospitals in New York. In 1883, while serving as Superior General of her congregation, she accepted a plea from the King of Hawaii to care for females afflicted with Hansen's disease (leprosy). She and six sisters established one hospital, ran a second, cared for these women, and opened a home for their children on Oahu. When the government forced these poor "outcasts" into exile on Molokai, Mother Marianne and her sisters accompanied them. She cared for the dying Fr. Damien (now St. Damien) and founded a home for women and girls with Hansen's disease. There she brought joy, hope, beauty and a sense of dignity into their lives—sewing dresses for them in the latest fashions, teaching them the faith, as well as skills in embroidery and other arts. Pope Benedict has called her a "striking example of sanctity and heroic charity."