



Homily for 5/17/2020

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter - Extraordinary Form

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*Vain Religion*

St. James warns us against vain religion when he wrote, “The man whose tongue is not controlled imagines that he is devout, but this is self-deception. That man’s worship is pointless.” This is vain religion. St. James was not saying something original and was obviously teaching the meaning of the very words he heard from Jesus, when He had warned against false prophets who come in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. He said, then, very clearly, “You will know them by their fruits.” (Matthew 7:16)

It seems to me that this is a very timely injunction to us, especially as we celebrate this Mass in the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite, also called the Traditional Latin Mass. It is the venerable and blessed vehicle by which the majority of Western civilization was nourished for more than a millennium and a half, and which was the form of the Saving Sacrament of the Holy Sacrifice that was known by millions of converts to the Catholic faith over the course of centuries through the evangelizing efforts of Catholic missionaries to South America, Africa and Asia. It has faithfully stewarded the mysteries of faith received from the very lips of our Divine Savior Jesus Christ and handed on through Apostolic authority and succession to our own day. Because of this great witness of the very words and saving actions of Jesus made present to us through these mysteries, we are able to say with the disciples in the Gospel, “Because of this we believe that you, Jesus, came forth from God.” (John 16: 30)

However, we must be careful with this gift. The Church has been in a process of reform for the past 75 years, inspired by the Holy Spirit in order to proclaim the Gospel anew in this now third millennium of the Christian Era. This reform has not been without its perils, strife and pitfalls. There have been many a misstep and many more disagreements about the best way for it to continue. Many very good intentions, upon further reflection, were found to be misguided in practice and even in theory. Many of those efforts coincided with the Church’s call for a reform of the Liturgy and have suffered from the same difficulties. We are grateful then that Pope Benedict in his *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum*, allowed for the liberal use of this *Usus Antiquior*. This was allowed first in order to woo back those who were wounded by the Church’s rapid leap into reforms and secondly to give us a touchstone and grounding in our own Sacred Tradition to understand the saving message of the Gospel from a stable vantage point; tried and true.

However, this precious gift, that gives us access to the hermeneutic of continuity, is threatened by those who have peered into the ideal law of freedom but who promptly forgot how they appeared, as St. James predicted. I have spoken often of the need of those who make use of the Traditional Latin Mass to do a constant examination of conscience. Your attraction and even deep understanding of this more ancient form of worship carries with it an added onus of humility and discretion. This is the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite today and as such it requires an extraordinary commitment on the part of its adherents to live it out fruitfully. *You will know them by their fruits*. This may seem unfair or unjust to some. But I would remind you of our Lord’s admonition that to one to whom much is given, much will be required. (Luke 12:48). I would further suggest that adversity and challenge in persecution has always born much more fruit in the life of the Church than any era of relative tranquility and complacency. Therefore, we should, like the Apostles in the early Church who were persecuted, rejoice to be able to suffer for the sake of the name of Jesus. (Acts 5:41)

This reminder of the challenge and opportunity afforded to us through the offering of the Traditional Mass is welcome indeed in this trying time of the coronavirus pandemic. It has also been a wakeup call to us about where our proper loyalty and obedience lies. When it comes to pious practices and disciplines that reinforce our Catholic understanding of the sacraments, we have to be very careful to not put our idealism and zeal for the things of the Lord in front of due prudence and most importantly obedience to proper church authority; authorities which our



very Lord put over us in His Divine Providence. We must be careful to avoid the prideful exceptionalism that exempts oneself from following legitimate measures placed upon him, especially during a time of crisis, in order to exercise a faculty or even a right to a demonstrably better practice, all things being equal. We must not stoop to the level of those who disobeyed for liberal and progressive causes. We remember that many disobeyed and strayed from the Catholic faith claiming some Epikeia based on their pet cause and that somehow they did not ‘receive’ a teaching such as the immorality of artificial birth control or the proper understanding of the priesthood.

Much worse than disobedience, though, has been the vile and hate-filled rhetoric that has erupted recently on social media by those who profess a more traditional understanding of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the reception of Holy Communion. There is an unacceptable level of anger and vitriol in the many online “trolls” who do not know how to control their tongue or their typing fingers and who, thinking they are advancing their cause by the strength of their verbiage, instead do it irreparable damage and harm through the scandal it brings to those who watch in horror as sacrilegious rancor is spewed supposedly in the name of true religion.

This culminated this past week in a few people from places far away outside our own Diocese calling to the office of our Bishop and saying horrible and vile things to our Diocesan Receptionist. They did so supposedly in the name of spiritual ideals, but they are the very ones St. James warns us against. They are collectively “the man who listens to Divine revelation but does not put it into practice.” They are the ones who “imagine they are devout but are self-deceived.”

Indeed, my friends, it seems that St. James’ injunction is well-timed, and we must act on this revelation. We must be doers of the Word. This means precisely that we cannot exempt ourselves from the obligation of charity, which is our supreme law. We must be honest that, whether it is justified or not, whether it is your fault or not, the adherents of the Traditional Latin Mass these days have a very bad reputation. But don’t lose heart. We are, after all, peering into the ideal law of freedom, and we don’t have to be forgetful listeners. It is for us now to put it into practice. If we do so, happy indeed will we be. “Looking after orphans and widows in their distress, keeping oneself unspotted by the world, this is pure and stainless worship before our God and Father.” We must not try to shirk this responsibility. We must not be tempted to run off to pseudo societies that make a mockery of the Bride of Christ and cast dispersions on her like a jealous sister would. Rather, we are called to stay and grow in holiness through adversity. It is for us to stand at the foot of the cross and sing, as in today’s Offertory chant, “Bless the Lord our God, you peoples, loudly sound his praise; he has given life to my soul and has not let my feet slip. Blessed be the Lord, who refused me not my prayer, or his kindness, alleluia.”