

**BASILICA OF GUANAJATO  
GUANAJATO, MEXICO  
MEMORIAL OF SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS  
DECEMBER 14, 2001**

**Homily**

Today, we remember one of the great spiritual teachers and writers of the Church, Saint John of the Cross. His spiritual doctrine has inspired many and continues to inspire many. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, for example, was very much influenced by Saint John of the Cross in developing her Little Way. Our Holy Father Pope John Paul II did his doctoral studies in theology on the spiritual teaching of Saint John of the Cross.

Saint John was a Carmelite, a member of that religious order in the Church which traces its origins to Mount Carmel in the Holy Land. It is an order which is under the protection of our Blessed Mother, under her title of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and which follows very much a Marian spirituality of total consecration to Christ and of participation in the mystery of His Redemptive Incarnation, that is of death to self and sin, and of life in Christ, for God and neighbor, first the neighbor in the monastery and then the neighbor in the whole world. The symbol of the spirituality is the brown scapular. The scapular which covers the body symbolizes "putting on Christ," welcoming Christ into my whole being, giving over to Christ, to His gentle reign, my whole life.

The heart of Saint John's teaching is the Cross, the discipline of body and spirit to follow in Christ's Way of the Cross. It is the way of purification of the mind and heart, so that I begin to have the mind and heart of Christ. Saint Paul uses the image of putting on Christ to stress the conversion of life, which is necessary in order to follow Christ. I must put off my self with all of my disordered desires in order to put on Christ, to become like Christ and to have His desires.

Saint John of the Cross teaches that the purification of mind and heart, which produces the conversion of life, is a daily task. It is a matter of understanding more and more of life, according to God's plan and with the help of His grace. It is a matter of loving others more and more, according to God's plan and with the help of His grace. It is the daily strengthening of the virtues in our life, the daily drawing upon the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit in order to know how to live truly in Christ and to have the courage to do so.

**II.** Our Lord points out in today's Gospel how fickle the people are in responding to His public ministry, His teaching and example of life. In short, the people always find an excuse for not doing what God asks of them, and for doing what they please. (Gospel) In fact, obeying God's commandments, as the Lord has instructed us through the Prophet Isaiah, is the way to our happiness, to richness and fullness of life. It is not a question of being strict or lax, but of being true to God and His will. It is obedience to God which brings blessings and vindication before those who would mock or reject a Christ-like way of life. (Reading I)

Our Lord Jesus Christ, in presenting His teaching, was clear that the Gospel does not in any way replace or mitigate the commandments of God's Law, but brings them to fulfillment by teaching their origin and fulfillment in the love of God and neighbor, and by giving the grace of God, God's love in our mind and heart, in order to obey them.

Our following Christ, therefore, means a deepening understanding of and adherence to God's commandments. Christ frees us, with His grace, for obedience to the Commandments. He does not free us from obedience to the Commandments, which would not be freedom at all but enslavement to sin. Saint John of the Cross describes for us the way in which Christ dwells in us and how His coming to dwell with us depends upon the purification of our moral life through obedience to the Commandments.

**III.** It is in the Holy Eucharist that we find the grace of purification of our mind and heart, the daily conversion of our life, the daily living in Christ. In the Holy Eucharist, we unite our life to the life of Christ, especially His suffering, dying and rising from the dead. Through our participation in the Mass, Christ strengthens His life within us. What is more, Christ who becomes present for us in His true Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, under the species of bread and wine, through the renewal of His sacrifice on Calvary, remains with us in the species of bread which is truly the glorious Body of Christ. From the altar of sacrifice upon which Christ renews again the outpouring of His life for us, He is reposed in the tabernacle to be our spiritual food at any time, especially in times of sickness or at death.

His abiding presence in the tabernacle of our Church is a standing invitation to visit Him there. Saint Francis of Assisi understood the invitation of our Eucharistic Lord so well that he states in His Testament that, once he understood that Christ is present in the Holy Eucharist, he would never pass a Church without stopping to make a visit to our Lord.

Our prayer before the tabernacle is a renewal of our participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice in the presence of Him whom we have received in Holy Communion. It is also the stirring up in us of the desire to participate as often as possible in the Holy Eucharist, which is the source and the summit of our Christian being.

Our prayer before the Blessed Sacrament has its most solemn and efficacious form when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed to our view in the monstrance. Over the centuries, the Church has developed most beautiful and fitting forms of Eucharistic worship: exposition, benediction and processions. Especially during times of great trial and tribulation, the faithful have asked that the opportunity be provided them to pray before the Blessed Sacrament exposed for longer periods of time. In some places, this prayer before the exposed Blessed Sacrament has been continuous.

During the time of the Black Plague and during times of assault by enemy nations, the faithful have desired the possibility of the most comforting and efficacious prayer before our Lord Himself present in the consecrated host. Through their prayers before the Blessed Sacrament, they have received grace to embrace the Cross in their lives, to be purified in mind and heart, to be sustained in hope of God's unfailing presence, and to be filled with love of God and neighbor.

Thank God, today in our nation, there is a resurgence of Eucharistic adoration and, in some places, continuous Eucharistic adoration. In the godless culture which surrounds us, we need so much to be in the presence of our Eucharistic Lord, in order to bring Him to the world. We need the special graces which come from Eucharistic adoration in order to resist the attraction of a culture which appears to offer happiness but whose veiled destiny is despair and death. All of us, I am sure, have tasted some of the bitter fruit of a totally secularized culture in our lives and in the lives of those close to us. Our Lord is beckoning us to Himself in the Eucharistic Sacrifice and in His abiding Eucharistic presence. Our Lady of Guadalupe is drawing us to her Son, in His Real Presence with us, to find the wisdom and courage we need to live daily in Him, to follow daily in His Way, with Christ accompanying us all along the pilgrim journey home to God the Father. The Holy Eucharist is our sustenance in the pilgrimage of life; it is the food for the journey, at the end of life, to our heavenly home.

As a particular fruit of your pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, I urge you to seek time to visit our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, daily, if possible. Seek the opportunities, too, to adore our Eucharistic Lord exposed in the Blessed Sacrament. If there is no Church with regular exposition or continuous exposition in your area, perhaps you could be the messenger of Our Lady who helps to establish it. Our world, our nation, and we individually need so much the grace which comes from prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. How many are the accounts of graces received during the time of Eucharistic adoration! No doubt, you have your own stories. Pray before the Blessed Sacrament. Our Eucharistic Lord will not fail to receive your prayers and answer them.

**IV.** Now, we will have the investiture with the Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel for those who desire it. Probably many of you, like myself, have been wearing the Brown Scapular since you were first clothed with it at the time of your First Holy Communion. Today's investiture will be for you a renewal of your first investiture. For those who have not been invested, it is the occasion to receive a wonderful sacramental of your belonging completely to Christ, of your daily living in Christ, of your putting on Christ for your own salvation and the salvation of the world. May the Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel be for all of us the sign of our daily taking up of the cross with Christ to journey with Him to Calvary and to the Empty Tomb of the Resurrection.

**V.** Let us now unite ourselves to Christ in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, giving ourselves completely to Him, asking Him to fill our entire life with His love. May our participation in the Holy Eucharist sustain us in taking up the cross of Christ today and always, purifying our minds and hearts so that we can love God and our neighbor as Christ loves the Father and us.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel, help us by your prayers to see in the Brown Scapular, which you first gave to Saint Simon Stock, the sign of our life in Christ, of our taking up with Him the cross which is truly the Tree of Life.

Saint John of the Cross, pray for us that we may live the wisdom of the cross which you have brought to us as the fruit of your life in Christ.