

MEMORIAL OF SAINT LUCY, VIRGIN AND MARTYR  
CHURCH OF THE SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE  
LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN  
CONFERENCE: "A RETURN TO THE SACRED"  
DECEMBER 13, 2008

*Sir* 48:1-4, 9-11

*Ps* 80:2ac and 3b, 15-16, 18-19

*Mt* 17:9a, 10-13

## HOMILY

*Praised be Jesus Christ, now and for ever. Amen.*

1. As we continue our observance of the Season of Advent, the Holy Scriptures invite us to reflect upon prophecy and the privileged instruments of prophecy, Elijah and John the Baptist. Prophecy is the word which God speaks to teach us the truth and to express to us His love. Prophecy is God's word to us, spoken through a human instrument who places himself totally at the service of God the Holy Spirit. The Word of God, spoken through His prophets is always a call to conversion, which is addressed to sinful man. It is a call to recognize the lie of sin and the death it causes. The call to conversion, at the same time, is an invitation to ponder the truth of God and to be joyful in the gift of His love, which conquers sin and everlasting death, and leads us in the way of eternal life. Regarding the Prophet Elijah, the sacred author of the *Book of Sirach* declares:

Blessed is he who shall have seen you  
and who falls asleep in your friendship (Reading I).

2. The fruit of prophecy, the fruit of the communication of God's truth and love is seen in the life of Saint Lucy, Virgin and Martyr, whose memory we celebrate today. Saint Lucy, whose very name means light, turned totally to God in Jesus Christ, up to the offering of her virginity as a perpetual gift of love of Christ, a gift which she did not betray even before the threat of death. In Saint Lucy, the truth and love of God radiates, as light, in the incomparable beauty of holiness of life.

3. Saint John the Baptist brings to completion the mission of God's prophets. He announces God's dwelling in our midst, God the Son's taking of our human nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary, in order to fulfill God's sole desire in our regard, the desire to share with us His very life in every way. John the Baptist is the promised return of Elijah. Throughout his earthly life and now in the

Communion of Saints, he directs all men to Christ, to faith in God the Son made man and to life in Him in the Church. Rightly, at the moment of our fullest experience of God's love of us in Jesus Christ, that is, communion with Christ in His true Body and Blood, the priest presents to us the Sacred Host and the chalice of Precious Blood with the words of Saint John the Baptist: "Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world" (*Roman Missal*).

4. While the office of prophet has been brought to a close with the vocation and mission of Saint John the Baptist, the prophetic office continues in the Church through the faithful and courageous proclamation of the truth and love of God, given to us fully and perfectly in Jesus Christ, after the example of Saint John the Baptist. The Roman Pontiff and the Bishops in communion with him, together with the priests, the co-workers of the Bishops, have the first responsibility for carrying out the prophetic office. All of the faithful, to the degree that they are obedient to the teaching of the faith and to the discipline it requires cooperate in the prophetic office by the witness of their lives. All are called to radiate the truth and love of God through the beauty of a holy life, a life like that of Saint Lucy, which brings light to the world and anticipates the fullness of light at Christ's Return in Glory.

5. Our celebration today, in the Church of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, leads us to a deeper understanding of the prophetic office of the Church, faithfully carrying out the work of John the Baptist, that is, presenting to all the world the Lamb of God Who alone is our salvation. Every shrine exists to provide an extraordinary encounter with Christ, which uncovers the extraordinary nature of our ordinary life in Christ. Through pilgrimage to a shrine, the truth and love of God is announced to us in a powerful way, so that we may not take for granted or ignore the daily ways in which God reveals His truth to us and draws us to share in His love. Pilgrimage to a shrine dedicated to Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Mother, under her title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, is a clearly prophetic experience, for Our Lady of Guadalupe, as she declared to Saint Juan Diego at her first apparition, is the Mother of God Who desires to manifest, to her children of America and far beyond, God Who is all truth and Whose mercy and love towards man knows no limit.

6. Your conference, "The Return to the Sacred," fittingly takes place at a shrine in its church which is the point of arrival of every pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In particular, your conference has a most fitting setting, a church in which every possible effort has been made to express the sacred through the beauty of architecture and art which are rightly called sacred. A return to the sacred, it seems to me, must necessarily be a pilgrimage through which one is guided

to God's truth and love by architecture and art which are organically united with the architecture and art which have served the Church's mission from the days of the House Church and the Catacombs. Evidently, the pilgrimage requires that the pilgrim remain on the path along which Christ leads and accompanies us, avoiding the temptation to be fascinated by forms of architecture and art which cannot be sacred because they do not express the truth and love of God. For instance, one thinks of forms of architecture and art in the modern period which are inspired by a godless rationalism, secularism and relativism. Such art can never be sacred because it cannot express the truth and love of God. It is my hope that you, the participants in today's conference, will have a direct experience of the organic unity of sacred architecture and art in this House of God and House of the Church.

7. It must also be observed that music is integral to the expression of God's truth and love through beauty. Music which has the title of sacred also must necessarily be organically united to the Church's long tradition of employing voice and instrument to express God's truth and love, beginning with Gregorian Chant which has its roots in the ancient chant of God's chosen people. Music employed in sacred rites cannot be just any music but must be music inspired by the sacred text of the Holy Scriptures and the Magisterium. Likewise, the Church and her musicians must avoid the temptation to employ music which is secular or expressive of an emotionalism and sentimentalism unworthy of the sublime beauty of a holy life. Even as you see in this church the service of architecture and art which are organically united to the artistic tradition of the Church, so, too, the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe is firmly committed to the return to sacred music in living continuity with the unbroken tradition of the Church worship of God with voice and instrument.

8. May your conference inspire in all participants an ever deeper appreciation of the sacred as it has been expressed in the Church's architecture and art. May you who are architects and artists desiring to serve Christ in the Church find in today's conference a source of new enthusiasm and new energy for your irreplaceable cooperation in the prophetic office of the Church. May we all, as we contemplate the architecture and art which strives to express the beauty of God's truth and love, recognize its ultimate fruit in the inspiration of what is most beautiful of all, that is, a holy life, a life lived totally in Christ.

9. Let us now lift up our hearts, together with the Immaculate Heart of the Mother of God, to the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus, ever open to receive us in His Eucharistic Sacrifice. Resting our hearts in His Most Sacred Heart, the fountain of God's unceasing and immeasurable mercy and love,

may we be healed and strengthened to give witness to God's truth and love, through the beauty of sacred architecture, sacred art and sacred music, and, above all, through the incomparable beauty of holiness of life.

*Heart of Jesus, of Whose fullness we have all received, have mercy on us.*

*Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of America and Star of the New Evangelization, pray for us.*

*Saint Lucy, Virgin and Martyr, pray for us.*

*Saint Juan Diego, pray for us.*