

MEMORIAL OF SAINT BRIDGET OF SWEDEN, RELIGIOUS  
*SPECULUM IUSTITIAE* CONFERENCE FOR CANON AND CIVIL LAWYERS  
SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE  
LA CROSSE  
23 JULY 2014

Gal 2, 19-20  
Ps 34, 2-3. 4-5. 6-7. 8-9. 10-11  
Jn 15, 1-8

## HOMILY

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

The inspired words of Saint Paul in the Letter to the Galatians underline the humble and yet irreplaceable service of the law in the life of grace. The law disciplines persons and situations, in order to dispose them for the action of divine grace, in order to open hearts to receive from the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Saint Paul declares: “Through the law I died to the law, that I might live for Christ; ....”<sup>1</sup> The law addresses our life “in the flesh,” so that it can be transformed into life in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Obedience to the law is the pruning which permits us as branches to remain ever more securely and fruitfully united to the Vine Who is Christ. Our Lord assured the disciples that the Father, the Vine Grower, prunes us, the branches who are bearing fruit, so that we may bear more fruit. Our Lord assures us: “You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you.”<sup>3</sup> Obedience to the word of Christ which comes to us in His holy Church, His Mystical Body, purifies us to receive the gift of His life, the gift of the Holy Spirit Who teaches us and leads us to live for Christ, to live in the faithful and enduring love of God and of our neighbor. When we are obedient to the word of Christ, we can exclaim with Saint Paul: “I have been crucified; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me: ....”<sup>4</sup> We respect and embrace the discipline of the law, because we trust Our Lord’s words to us: “Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gal 2, 19.

<sup>2</sup> Gal 2, 20.

<sup>3</sup> Jn 15, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Gal 2, 20.

<sup>5</sup> Jn 15, 5.

Canon law is not in contrast with the many works of divine grace in the Church. Canonical discipline is not opposed to good pastoral practice. Canon law rather assures that the work of divine grace will be received into souls which are well disposed and that practical practice will be in accord with the mind and heart of Christ. One thinks, for instance, of the coherence between the unmistakably strong word of Christ in the Gospel on the indissolubility of marriage<sup>6</sup> and the norm of can. 1141: “A marriage that is *ratum et consummatum* can be dissolved by no human power and by no cause, except death.”<sup>7</sup>

I recall the words of Pope Saint John Paul II in the Apostolic Constitution *Sacrae Disciplinae Leges* by which he promulgated the 1983 Code of Canon Law for the Latin Church. He articulated the purpose of canon law, that is, the service of the faith and grace, and of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and charity. He noted that, far from hindering the living of our life in Christ, canonical discipline safeguards and fosters our Christian life. He declared:

[I]ts purpose is rather to create such an order in the ecclesial society that, while assigning the primacy to love, grace and charisms, it at the same time renders their organic development easier in the life of both the ecclesial society and the individual persons who belong to it.<sup>8</sup>

As such, canon law can never be in conflict with the Church’s doctrine but is, in the words of the saintly Pontiff, “extremely necessary for the Church.”<sup>9</sup> Because of the essential service of canon law to the life of the Church, Pope John Paul II reminded the Church that “by their very nature canonical laws are to be observed,” and, to that end, “the wording of the norms should be accurate” and “based on solid juridical, canonical and theological foundations.”<sup>10</sup>

Those of us who are ministers of justice in the Church or, in some way, work to make the Church’s discipline carefully known and observed face difficult challenges in a culture which is

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Mt 19, 3-9; Mk 10, 2-12.

<sup>7</sup> “Can. 1141 - Matrimonium ratum et consummatum nulla humana potestate nullaque causa, praeterquam morte, dissolvi potest.” English translation: Canon Law Society of America, *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition, New English Translation*, Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> “Codex eo potius spectat, ut talem gignat ordinem in ecclesiali societate, qui, praecipuas tribuens partes amoris, gratiae atque charismati, eodem tempore faciliorem reddat ordinatam eorum progressionem in vita sive ecclesialis societatis, sive etiam singulorum hominum, qui ad illam pertinent.” *SDL*, xi. Ioannes Paulus PP. II, Constitutio Apostolica *Sacrae Disciplinae Leges*, 25 Ianuarii 1983, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 75, Pars II (1983), p. xi. English translation: Canon Law Society of America, *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition, New English Translation*, Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1998, p. xxix-xxx.

<sup>9</sup> “Ecclesiae omnino necessarius est.” *Ibid.*, xii. English translation: *Ibid.*, p. xxxi.

<sup>10</sup> “canonicae leges suapte natura observantiam exigent... accurate fieret normarum expressio... in solido iuridico, canonico ac theologico fundamento inniterentur.” *Ibid.*, xiii. English translation: *Ibid.*, p. xxxi.

radically individualistic and relativistic and, therefore, is either totally hostile to the law or sees the law only as a means to accomplish a personal or group agenda. In many civil jurisdictions, positive law has been completely divorced from its necessary foundation in the natural law written by God on every human heart.<sup>11</sup> The antinomian culture easily has its detrimental influence in the Church, if we are not attentive to its incursions and if we do not cultivate respect for the law and obedience to it. We do not study and respect the law for its own sake but for the sake of the sacred realities which it safeguards and fosters. Obedience to the law is a fundamental and irreplaceable expression of humility and gratitude before the great gift of our life in the Church and the many supernatural gifts with which Our Lord showers us in the Church.

As cultivators of the sacred canons, we must always be greatly encouraged and inspired in our service by the word of Christ. Like the law itself, our service is humble and yet altogether necessary. It secures the justice which is the minimal but irreplaceable requirement of divine love. We must be realistic about the daily challenges we face and, at the same time, we must arm ourselves to face the challenges with faith, intelligence and courage. In all, we should be models of humility and confidence, trusting always in the unfailing assistance of the Holy Spirit indwelling the Church.

Saint Bridget of Sweden, whose memory we happily celebrate today, is a powerful teacher of the knowledge and respect for the Church's discipline in a time of lawlessness and corruption in society, in general, and also in the Church. The situation of her time in the Church was perhaps most poignantly represented by Rome itself, abandoned by the Pope who was held captive in Avignon. Dom Prosper Guéranger, in his commentary for today's feast, described the situation with these words:

Sacked by her own sons, she was daily losing some remnant of her ancient glory; her public roads were scenes of bloodshed; solitude reigned amid the ruins of her crumbling basilicas; sheep grazed in St. Peter's and the Lateran. From the seven hills anarchy had spread throughout Italy, transforming the towns into haunts of brigands, and the country parts into deserts. France was doomed to expiate, in the horrors of a hundred years' war, the captivity of

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Rom 2, 15.

the sovereign Pontiff.<sup>12</sup>

To help address so calamitous a situation, Our Lord spoke to the heart of a young woman in far away Sweden, inspiring in her a profound love of Him in His Passion and Death, and of His Mystical Body, the Church, in her suffering.

Saint Bridget was eventually led by Our Lord to make her home in Rome and to live there with heroic sanctity for twenty years, amid all of the misery and suffering, preparing for the return of the Roman Pontiff to his proper See. Dom Prosper Guéranger comments:

Taking up her abode in Rome, she there, by her holiness, prepared the way for the return of Christ's vicar. There for twenty years she, as it were, personified the eternal city, enduring all its bitter sufferings, knowing all its moral miseries, presenting its tears and prayers to our Lord; continually visiting the tombs of the apostles and martyrs throughout the peninsula; and at the same time never ceasing to transmit to Pontiffs and kings the messages dictated to her by God.<sup>13</sup>

Saint Bridget did not live to see the fruit of her constant prayers and sacrifices, that is, the return of the Successor of Saint Peter to the See of Peter, to which another woman of heroic sanctity, Saint Catherine of Siena, contributed so significantly, but her holiness of life, her unswerving respect for the law of God and of the Church, surely and faithfully prepared the way for that return.

The splendor of the heroic sanctity of Saint Bridget merits so much more reflection. But, today, in the context of the *Speculum Iustitiae* Conference for Canon and Civil Lawyers, let us look upon her life as a mirror of justice, in imitation of the Mother of God, the Mirror of Justice. Let us ask her to teach us and to assist us by her prayers, so that we, servants of justice, may never tire in prayer, study, and sacrifice for the sake of the salvation of many souls.

The Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe is certainly a privileged place in which to contemplate through the eyes of the Virgin Mary and the eyes of her daughter, Saint Bridget of Sweden, the service of the law for our participation in the Mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation, the Mystery of Faith, the Mystery of God's immeasurable and unceasing love at work for us in the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. Here, Our Lady of Guadalupe draws our

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<sup>12</sup> Prosper Guéranger, *The Liturgical Year, Time after Pentecost*, Book V, tr. The Benedictines of Stanbrook Abbey (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2000), p. 361.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 363.

hearts to her heart, as she did for Saint Bridget, so that she may direct us, with maternal love, to give our hearts, one with her Immaculate Heart, completely into the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus, her Divine Son. Here, Our Lady of Guadalupe teaches us the obedience to God's will, the ever attentive listening to His voice teaching us to abandon our false idols and to follow His way to our happiness and peace, already during our earthly pilgrimage, and finally and perfectly at the destination of our pilgrimage, the Kingdom of Heaven.

Let us now lift up our hearts, one with the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus opened for us in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Let us lift up to the Heart of Jesus all of the intentions which we carry in our hearts. In the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, as Bridget of Sweden so wonderfully teaches us, our hearts will be healed of the forgetfulness of God and of the rebellion against His law. They will be inflamed with Divine Love, so that, from our hearts, will flow "rivers of living water," the abundance of pure and selfless love of God and of our neighbor.<sup>14</sup>

*Heart of Jesus, abode of justice and love, have mercy on us!*  
*Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of America and Mirror of Justice, pray for us!*  
*Saint Bridget of Sweden, pray for us!*  
*Saint Juan Diego, pray for us!*

Raymond Leo Cardinal BURKE

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<sup>14</sup> Jn 7, 38.