

MEMORIAL OF SAINT MARTHA
PILGRIMAGE FROM THE ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT LOUIS
SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE, LA CROSSE
JULY 29, 2014

1 Jn 4, 7-16
Ps 34, 2-3. 4-5. 6-7. 8-9. 10-11
Jn 11, 19-27

HOMILY

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

Saint Martha whose memory we celebrate with special joy today is venerated as a patron of those engaged in the apostolate of hospitality, especially on behalf of brothers and sisters who are unable to provide for their own board and room. In fact, she is a patron for all Christians, giving us an example of the devotion to Our Lord which necessarily includes devotion to the members of His Mystical Body who are in need. Saint Martha also intercedes for us, so that we may always manifest such devotion to Our Lord and to all for whom He gave His life on Calvary and for whom He continues to give His life in the Eucharistic Sacrifice we are now offering.

Certainly, Martha is an outstanding example of one who served our Lord in His needs, so that He could be about the work of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. Her service of our Lord is noble and has been esteemed in the Church throughout the centuries. However, in venerating Saint Martha as one engaged in the apostolate by providing hospitality, we can tend to lose sight of another and more fundamental aspect of her person, which underlies the loving service of hospitality which she gave to our Lord and to others.

Martha was, first of all, a person of deep faith, of deep trust in God's promises, of complete confidence in our Lord Jesus Christ, God-the-Son Incarnate. Hospitality, from the beginning, has been greatly esteemed among all of the virtues, because it is an expression of the longing to meet Our Lord Himself and to serve Him. One thinks, for instance, of the hospitality shown by Abraham and Sara to three mysterious men who visited them at their tent by the Oaks of Mamre, announcing God's promise of a son in their advanced years.¹ In Christian iconography, the visit of three men is seen as a visit of God, of the three Persons in the Unity of

¹ Cf. Gen 18, 1-15.

the Most Holy Trinity.

Dom Prosper Guéranger, in his commentary for the feast day of Saint Martha, provides an excellent reflection on the virtue of hospitality. Regarding the hospitality of Saint Martha, he writes:

Glory, then, to this daughter of Sion, of royal descent, who, faithful to the traditions of hospitality handed down from the patriarchs and early fathers, was blessed more than all of them in the exercise of this noble virtue! These ancestors of our faith, pilgrims themselves and without fixed habitation, knew more or less obscurely that the Desired of Israel and the Expectation of the nations was to appear as a wayfarer and a stranger on earth; and they honoured the future Saviour in the person of every stranger that presented himself at their tent door; just as we, their sons, in the faith of the same promises now accomplished, honour Christ in the guest whom His goodness sends us. This relation between Him that was to come and the pilgrim seeking shelter made hospitality the most honoured handmaid of divine charity. More than once did God show his approval by allowing angels to be entertained in human form. If such heavenly visitations were an honour of which our earth was not worthy, how much greater was Martha's privilege in rendering hospitality to the Lord of angels! If before the coming of Christ it was a great thing to honour Him in those who prefigured Him, and if now to shelter and serve Him in His mystical members deserves an eternal reward, how much greater and more meritorious was it to receive in person that Jesus, the very thought of whom gives to virtue its greatness and its merit.²

The hospitality which Our Lord received at the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus was, first and foremost, an expression of faith in Him as the “Desired of Israel” and the “Expectation of the nations.”

Today's Gospel records a remarkable expression of the faith which underlay the hospitality of Saint Martha. Listen to her words to our Lord in her profound grief after the death and burial of her beloved brother Lazarus:

² Prosper Guéranger, *The Liturgical Year, Time after Pentecost*, Book IV, tr. The Benedictines of Stanbrook Abbey (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2000), p. 210.

Lord, if you had been here,
 my brother would not have died.
 But even now I know that whatever you ask of God,
 God will give you.³

As the conversation with our Lord continued, He announced to Martha the great mystery of the Kingdom of God present in her midst, present in His person, to which Martha responded:

Yes, Lord,
 I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God,
 the One Who is coming into the world.⁴

Martha's faith was firm under the test of profoundest grief at the loss of the earthly presence of her dearest brother Lazarus. She trusted that God's promise of liberation from sin and death, His promise of eternal life, would be fulfilled for her brother. She trusted in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Anointed of the Lord, the King Who frees us from the bonds of sin and everlasting death, and gives us eternal life.

Let us pray today for the grace to imitate Saint Martha in her faith in Our Lord's promises and in her fundamental expression of faith by means of hospitality. Let us pray especially that, in moments of great trial and sorrow, our faith will remain firm, confident in Our Lord's abiding presence with us. Let us pray for the grace to be ever more perfect in manifesting our faith by welcoming every brother and sister into our lives, especially those who are in most need.

The words of Saint John the Apostle must be our own:

We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us.
 God is love, and whoever remains in love
 remains in God and God in him.⁵

Not by chance did Pope Benedict XVI write to us about Christian love in his first Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est*. It is the knowledge of the love of God in our lives which draws us to participate in the same divine love. At the conclusion of the Encyclical Letter, he reminded us of the source of our life of faith and charity in the love of God.

Writing about the heroic example of love in the lives of the saints, he rightly dwelled

³ Jn 11, 21-22.

⁴ Jn 11, 27.

⁵ 1 Jn 4, 16.

upon the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, her love of Christ and her love of all those adopted as true sons and daughters by God the Father in Christ, His only-begotten Son. Pope Benedict XVI observed:

At the same time, the devotion of the faithful shows an infallible intuition of how such love is possible: it becomes so as a result of the most intimate union with God, through which the soul is totally pervaded by him – a condition which enables those who have drunk from the foundation of God’s love to become in their turn a fountain from which “flows rivers of living water” (*Jn 7:38*).⁶

The heroic love which we see in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary and in the life of Saint Martha has its one and only source in God’s love of us. Trusting in God and in His promises, they drank deeply from the fountain of God’s love and, thus, became, a fountain of the living water of love for countless others.

When we come on pilgrimage to her shrine, Our Lady of Guadalupe, with deepest maternal affection, manifests to us the great mystery of God’s love for us, inviting us to have complete confidence in His promises. She draws us to encounter here her Divine Son, the fulfillment of all of God the Father’s promises. She draws us especially to the Sacraments of Penance and of the Most Holy Eucharist, so that we may know directly in our lives the fulfillment of God’s promise of liberation from sin and death, His promise of eternal salvation. Giving our hearts into the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus, we respond with ever more perfect love of Christ and of all our brothers and sisters in Him, especially those who are in most need. The foundation and building of this holy place has been criticized as a lack of care for the poor to whom the resources of the Shrine could be devoted. In fact, this holy place draws us, in a singular and most profound way, to the only font of love and care for the poor, Our Lord Jesus Christ, as Our Lord Himself taught those who criticized Him for accepting the most generous act of devotion of Mary at Bethany.⁷

Rejoicing in the memory and in the living intercession of Saint Martha, let us now

⁶ “Demonstrat fidelium pietas eodem tempore certam perceptionem quo pacto talis amor fieri possit: longe intimam cum Deo per coniunctionem, per eius pervasionem – quod sinit ut is, qui Dei amoris ex fonte bibit, scaturigo ipse fiat ex quo «flumina ... fluent aquae vivae» (Io 7, 38).” Benedictus PP. XVI, Litterae Encyclicae *Deus caritas est*, “De christiano amore,” 25 Decembris 2005, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, n. 42. English translation: Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter God Is Love: Deus Caritas Est* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006), pp. 51-52, no. 42.

⁷ Cf. *Jn 12*, 1-8.

approach the fountain of Divine Love. Let us lift our poor and sinful hearts to the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus, ever open to receive us and to pour out upon us in abundance the mercy and love of God the Father. Through the Eucharistic Sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us become with Him altars of sacrifice from which the love of God is proclaimed and witnessed in the world. May our hearts, like the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the heart of Saint Martha, rest ever more perfectly in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, so that the word of Christ may be manifest in our lives: “He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water’.”⁸

Let us pray with Pope Benedict XVI through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary:

Holy Mary, Mother of God,
 you have given the world its true light,
 Jesus, your Son – the Son of God.
 You abandoned yourself completely
 to God’s call
 and thus became a wellspring
 of the goodness which flows forth from Him.
 Show us Jesus. Lead us to Him.
 Teach us to know and love Him,
 so that we can become
 capable of true love
 and be fountains of living water
 in the midst of a thirsting world.⁹

Heart of Jesus, burning furnace of charity, have mercy on us.
Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of America and Star of the New Evangelization, pray for us.
Saint Martha, pray for us.
Saints Louis of Francis, Vincent de Paul and Rose Philippine Duchesne, pray for us.
Saint Juan Diego, pray for us.

⁸ Jn 7, 38.

⁹ “Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, veram mundo dedisti lucem, Iesum, Filium tuum – Dei Filium. Penitus te Deo vocanti tradidisti atque ita scaturigo facta es bonitatis, quae ex eo manat. Iesum nobis monstra. Ad eum nos dirige. Doce nos eum cognoscere eumque amare, ut nos pariter evadere veri amoris possimus capaces atque sitiendi coram mundo aquae vitae reperiamur fontes.” *Deus caritas est*, n. 42. English translation: p. 52, no 42.

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