

Third Sunday of Advent  
Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe  
La Crosse  
December 11, 2016

Is 35, 1-6. 10  
Ps 146, 6-7. 8-9. 9-10  
Jas 5, 7-10  
Mt 11, 2-11

## HOMILY

*Praised be Jesus Christ!*

Today, the Church sustains our preparation for the Solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord by reminding us of how near He is to us in the Church. The days of Advent are necessarily occupied with a serious preparation for Christmas, so that we will be well disposed to welcome Our Lord into our hearts on the wonderful day of His Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Bethlehem. In the Gospel, Christ describes for the disciples of Saint John the Baptist the signs of the fulfillment of his mission as herald of the Our Lord at His Coming. They are signs which the disciples of John had witnessed with their own ears and eyes.<sup>1</sup> He then indicated to them the truth of the Baptist's mission with these words:

This is the one about whom it is written: *Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you.* Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.<sup>2</sup>

As great as is the mission of John the Baptist, infinitely greater is the grace won for us by the Savior of Whom he is the herald.

From the moment of the Baptism of Christ, the people witnessed the fulfillment of the word of God spoken by the Prophet Isaiah:

The glory of Lebanon will be given to them, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God.  
Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak, say

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mt 11 Lk 3, 10-14.

<sup>2</sup> Lk 3, 16.

to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you.<sup>3</sup>

In every word and deed of Christ, the people with ears to hear and eyes to see recognized the great mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation, of the coming of God the Son in our human nature, in order to save us from sin and eternal death by means of His Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

After His Ascension to the right hand of God the Father, Christ has never failed to pour forth the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit from His glorious pierced Heart into our poor and sinful hearts, so that we may have communion with Him already during the days of our earthly pilgrimage and perfect communion with Him in the Kingdom of Heaven. So it is that today we express already some part of the great joy which will be ours to celebrate the Birth of Our Lord. Today's joy, in fact, should mark every day of our lives, even the times when we are most beset with sufferings and trials. Saint James urges us, as he urged the first Christians:

You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand... Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.<sup>4</sup>

The serenity and joy which should be ours at all times is not founded on some way of thinking or some ideal but on the reality of Our Lord's abiding presence with us in the Church, especially through the Sacraments. No matter what the suffering or trial we endure, we know that we carry the cross with Christ Who, when we turn to Him each day in our hearts, never fails to draw us along the way of our eternal salvation.

Today, I offer the Holy Mass facing the Lord. With you and at the head of our congregation, I, too, will turn toward the Lord during the prayers and, above all, during the Eucharistic Prayer, in order to render more visible our recognition that it is Our Lord Himself Who inspires our prayer and Who acts during the Eucharistic Prayer to make sacramentally present His Sacrifice on Calvary for our eternal salvation. We all turn to Him; we all look to Him.

The practice of the priest facing the congregation, which developed during the years after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, was not in fact a discipline ordered by the Council. While it may have seemed helpful at the time, it now seems fitting and indeed important to return

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<sup>3</sup> Is 35, 2-4.

<sup>4</sup> Jas 5, 8. 10.

to the ancient practice by which the union of the priest who offers the Sacrifice of the Mass, in the person of Christ, and the congregation is visible to us all and inspires in us a more ready recognition of Christ in our midst, as He is most fully and perfectly present in the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

Today, I also have the joy of installing Father Elias Mary Mills, Friar of the Immaculate, as the third Rector of the Church of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe here. In giving thanks for the mission of Father Elias at the Shrine, I ask God's special blessing upon him, so that he may be a faithful herald of the Church's teaching, a compassionate minister of the Church's sacraments and sacramentals, and a trusted moral guide for the many pilgrims whom Our Lady of Guadalupe draws here to encounter her Divine Son as He acts through the ordained ministry of priests. Please pray for Father Elias each day, so that he will respond faithfully and generously to the important mission entrusted to his care.

We thank God, too, for the faithful service of Father Jacinto Maria Chapin, Friar of the Immaculate, as second Rector of the Shrine Church. Father Jacinto has served generously and well both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking pilgrims. Let us express our gratitude to him by remembering him in our prayers as he takes up new and weightier responsibilities within his religious community.

Finally, with particular joy, I welcome the Knights and Dames of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta who are making pilgrimage to the Shrine today. It is my privilege to serve as the personal representative of Pope Francis to the Order of Malta, and to assist, above all, in the spiritual guidance of the Order. Dear brothers and sisters in the Order of Malta, by your pilgrimage today, be renewed in the mission of our Order which is to defend the Catholic faith and to care for the poor, especially those who are infirm.

Today, not unlike the time of the foundation of our Order by Blessed Gerard in 1113, the Catholic faith is in need of defense against the enemies of Christ and of His Church. While our culture would teach us to be politically correct and to remain silent before the many assaults on the freedom of the Church and on the most fundamental norms of the moral law, as the Church faithfully teaches them to us, the grace of our membership in the Order gives us the wisdom and strength to defend the Catholic faith in word and in action. Closely united with the defense of the faith is our witness to Christ's life within us through the service of the poor. As we rejoice today

in the truth that Christ is indeed in our midst, let us pray for the grace to respond ever more faithfully and generously to Him in doing all that He asks of us as Knights and Dames of Malta.

Filled with abiding joy at Christ's living presence with us in the Church, let us now give our hearts, one with the Immaculate Heart of Mary, into the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus, opened for us in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Turning to the Lord in the most perfect prayer of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, let us receive into our hearts His always generous and unfailing sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit. Let us go forth from here to bring Christ to all whom we meet, especially to those who are far away from Christ and to all who are in need.

*Heart of Jesus, source of all consolation, have mercy on us.*

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

*Saint Joseph, Protector of holy Church, pray for us.*

*Saint Juan Diego, pray for us.*

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Raymond Leo Cardinal BURKE