

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

9 July 2017

“For I say to you that unless your justice exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the Kingdom of heaven.” Mt. 5:20

In his book of meditations titled *Divine Intimacy*, Father Gabriel of St. Magdalene identifies today’s liturgy as “**the Sunday of Fraternal Charity, a virtue so necessary to preserve proper relations with our neighbour.**” (p. 669) Likewise Jesus’ words in the Gospel (Mt. 5:20-24) state that our justice (fraternal charity) must be greater than that of the Jewish Scribes and Pharisees or else we will not enter the kingdom of heaven. We can see that Jesus not only warns us against the grave sin of murder, but also against sins against charity such as anger and hatred: “**You have heard that it was said to the ancients, ‘Thou shalt not kill’; and that whoever shall kill shall be liable to the judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; and whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca’ (empty-headed) shall be liable to the Sanhedrin; and whoever says, ‘Thou fool!’ shall be liable to the fire of Gehenna.**” Mt. 5: 21-22 We are also told not to keep hatred or grudges within us but rather to be reconciled with our brother before we offer our gifts at the altar. St. Peter in today’s Epistle (I Pt. 3:8-15) also reminds us that we must be charitable to our brothers: “**...be all like-minded, compassionate, lovers of the brethren, merciful, humble; not rendering evil for evil, or abuse for abuse, but contrariwise, blessing; for unto this were you called that you might inherit a blessing.**” I Pt. 3:8-9 Jesus’ message is essentially one of charity as St. John tells us: “**Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God. And everyone who loves is born of God, and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love.**” I Jn. 4:7-8

All love comes from God

“The foundation of this love for our brethren is the love of God; therefore, in the Collect, we pray that God may increase the fire of this love for him in our hearts, that we may love him in all things and above all things. Charity towards others is but a manifestation of our love for God. The means to acquire this love is insinuated in the Communion antiphon: ‘**One thing I have asked of the Lord, this will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.**’ Ps. 26:4 Those who remain

close to God—in his house—will always walk in his love, and therefore will love their brothers in Christ. In the Epistle, St. Peter tells us to give glory to Christ in our hearts. This is impossible without true love for our neighbour. Indeed the best glory we can give to God is to love him in others, even if they have done us harm, because we have all been baptized in Christ, who is the common Head of the whole Body.” *The Preacher’s Encyclopaedia*, p. 328 St. Peter, quoting Psalm 33:13-7, spells out the need for charity if one would wish God to hear his prayers and bless him. “**He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good, let him seek after peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are upon the just, and his ears unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.**” I Pt. 3:10-12. In proportion to prayer and sacrifice, those who wish to bring the blessing of God upon themselves must be at peace with their neighbours.

The Precept of Absolute Reconciliation

In the passage right before today’s Gospel, Jesus told the Pharisees: “**Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to destroy, but to fulfil.**” Mt. 5:17 Jesus is teaching the true meaning of the Mosaic Law (The Ten Commandments) when He reminds them that they must have pure hearts and cannot have any hatred or anger for their neighbour. If they do, they must come to peace with him. In today’s Gospel Jesus also demands reconciliation: “**Therefore, if thou art offering thy gift at the altar and there rememberest that thy brother has anything against thee, leave thy gift before the altar and go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.**” Mt. 5:23- 24 Cornelius a Lapide comments on the meaning of this passage: “**Therefore, this is a precept, both of law and of the natural law, or better, a supernatural precept connatural with grace. For this is the order of virtues, that reconciliation, peace, and unity precede religion and an act of Sacrifice, so as to dispose the soul to this; hence, this precept obliged even the Jews under the old law. Here, nevertheless, it is sanctioned more strictly by Christ, because by the Incarnation of the Word He has, in the very closest manner, united us all to Himself and to one another. This greater union, which we have, therefore, through Christ, demands greater love and unity among Christian brethren: so He has said, ‘A new**

commandment give I unto you, that you love one another.’ Jn. 13:34 Also because the Sacrifice of the Eucharist is holier than the ancient sacrifices. It is the gathering together and the communion of the Body, of which we all partake; and thereby we are all mutually united to Christ and one another. Hence, it is called ‘*Communion,*’ that is, the common union of all. Since, therefore, the Eucharist is a sacrifice, as well as a sacrament and profession of mutual union and peace, it is necessary that all discord should be done away with, and that those who have offended should reconcile themselves to those whom they have offended before this Sacred Synaxis, lest they be found liars. For in truth he is a liar who takes this Sacrament of Union, i.e. the Eucharist, with his neighbour, and is not in union with, but bears a grudge or rancour against him in his heart. St. Augustine says it beautifully (serm. 16 de Verbis Domini), ‘The Lord is seeking you more than a gift; you are bringing your gift yet you are not God’s gift. Christ seeks the one whom He has redeemed by His Blood more than what you have procured in your barn.’” *The Commentary of Cornelius a’ Lapide: St. Matthew’s Gospel, Vol. 1, p. 253-4*

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us.”

We pray in the Our Father for forgiveness of our sins, and we ask the Father to forgive us as we forgive those who have offended us. If we hold unforgiveness in our hearts, can we expect the Lord to forgive us? Will He hear our prayers as St. Peter tells us that He is attentive to the just? *“For the eyes of the Lord are upon the just, and his ears unto their prayers.”* I Pt.3:12 Let us always be reconciled to those who have offended us, and then we can be assured that the Lord will hear our prayers.

Addenda

Holy Father Canonizes 800 Saints

On 12 May 2013, Pope Francis I canonized 800 martyrs of Otranto, Italy decapitated on 14 August 1480 for refusing to renounce Christ and accept Allah. Bl. Antonio Primardo, the elderly tailor who inspired his fellow citizens to proclaim Christ rather than convert to Islam... (He) is the only name that has come down to us. His companions were 800 unknown fisherman, craftsman, shepherds and farmers from a small town, whose blood, five centuries ago, was shed solely because they were Christian...” The Moslem

armada which numbered 90 galleys and 18,000 soldiers laid siege to the town with its 400 men at arms. “During the night, many of the soldiers of the guard lowered themselves over the city walls with ropes and fled. Only the inhabitants remained to defend Otranto.” After two weeks of fighting, the Moslems were able to breach the city walls. They went to the Cathedral where Arch. Stefano was in his pontifical vestments with the crucifix in hand. “To the order that he no longer speak the name of Christ ...the Archbishop responded by exhorting the assailants to conversion, and at this his head was cut off with a scimitar.” The Moslem leader Pasha Ahmed offered the men “their lives, possessions, and all the benefits they enjoyed in their homeland: otherwise they would all be massacred.” Antonio Primardo replied, *“Would that all believed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and were ready to die a thousand times for him’....* And turning to the Christians, Primardo spoke these words, *‘My brothers, until today we have fought in defence of our homeland, to save our lives, and for our earthly governors; now it is time for us to fight to save our souls for our Lord. And since he died on the cross for us, it is fitting that we should die for Him, remaining firm and constant in the faith, and with this earthly death we will earn eternal life and the glory of martyrdom.’* At these words, all began to shout with one voice and with great fervour that they wanted to die a thousand times, by any sort of death, rather than renounce Christ.”

They were all condemned to death. “...before the others, the head of the elderly Primardo should be cut off. Primardo was hateful to him (Ahmed), because he never stopped acting as an apostle toward his fellows. And before placing his head upon a stone, he told his companions that he saw Heaven opened and the comforting angels; that they should be strong in the faith and look to Heaven, already open to receive them.

“He bowed his head and it was cut off, but his corpse stood back up on his feet, and despite the efforts of the butchers, it remained erect and unmoving, until all were decapitated. The marvelous and astonishing event would have been a lesson of salvation for those infidels, if they had not been rebels against the light that enlightens every man who lives in the world. Only one of the butchers, named Berlabei, believed courageously in the miracle and, declared himself a Christian in a loud voice, and was condemned to be impaled.” (from Paul Likoudis, *“Holy Father To Proclaim 800 Saints,” The Wanderer,* May 9, 2013, p. 8A).