

Funeral Mass
for
Archbishop Lawrence A. Burke, S.J.
Holy Trinity Cathedral
Kingston, Jamaica
4 February, 2010

Homily
by
Most Reverend Patrick C. Pinder
Archbishop of Nassau

Isaiah 61: 1-3

II Timothy 4:1-8

John 10:9-15

Beloved:

We gather in grief and in gratitude to commend to God our beloved Archbishop Lawrence Aloysius Burke. He was born here in Kingston, Jamaica and he died here. Yet between birth and death he made a contribution, exerted an influence and left a mark far beyond the boundary of this nation. It is for that reason that I, along with so many others, have traveled far for this funeral today.

Lawrence Aloysius Burke arrived in Nassau as a priest. It was there and it was for there that he was first ordained a bishop. Of course, at the very beginning of his 23 year term as bishop of Nassau, there were pockets of displeasure at his coming. There were those who had different ideas and strong feelings about it.

The truth is Archbishop Burke was good for us. His leadership was a grace and a blessing for us. In many ways he left us much better off than he met us. For that we can only be grateful and thankful. His presence and his leadership offered us a lesson in the benefits of regional co-operation. He came to us virtually unknown but he left us highly respected and deeply loved. In the name of the Bahamian Catholic community and indeed of the entire Bahamian community, I express our most profound gratitude to the Church and the people of Jamaica.

I thought it most fitting that we concluded last night's Vigil with a mention of the words "Jesus is Lord." These words form the Episcopal motto of Archbishop Burke. "Jesus is Lord" is the most basic confession of Christian faith. It is perhaps the most ancient creed for those who came to believe in Jesus as the Christ. It was a baptismal formula for the earliest believers. Those who approached the font of baptism did so by way of conversion and conviction and these words made all the difference to them. "Jesus is Lord"...they said it because they meant it and they intended to live by it.

To be sure the expression is very much Sacred Scripture. It is found throughout the letters of Paul.¹ It represents an inward faith which seeks outward expression in words and in action. It demands a mighty consistency between what you say you believe and the way you live your life. It serves

¹ See for example Romans 10:9, I Corinthians 12:3 and Philipians 2:4.

as a compelling moral compass and a guide which provides a firm and fixed point of reference in a constantly changing world. It is the mission statement which makes a man of God a man for others.

To understand something of the depth and fullness of the expression “Jesus is Lord” is to begin to understand the motive, the method and the mission of the man we came to know and admire as Archbishop Lawrence Aloysius Burke.

He was first and foremost a man of faith. All his talent and time and energy served this faith. The seeds of this faith were sewn in his home and his family. Beyond that he was very grateful for the religious formation he received as a member of the Society of Jesus. Commonly known as “The Jesuits,” the Society of Jesus was formed in 1540 by a Spaniard from the Basque region. This former soldier, who became a mystic and a saint, is named Ignatius of Loyola.

Ignatius’ great masterpiece, which is also a classic of western spirituality, is known as The Spiritual Exercises. It outlines a four-week-long program of retreat comprised of prayer and contemplation.

“The Exercises use memory, imagination, mind and heart with astute insight into human nature. They teach methods of prayer and discernment in making choices. They lead the participant through an understanding of God’s love and toward a committed personal response of love.”²

Perhaps the best known passage of The Spiritual Exercises is a little prayer of self-offering called the Suscipe.

This is what it says.

“Take, Lord receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given all to me. To

² M.-C. Durkin, “Ours” Jesuit Portraits. Strasbourg,: Editions du Signe, 2006, pg. 17.

you, O Lord I return it. All is yours, dispose of it wholly according to your will. Give me only your love and your grace for that is sufficient for me.”

Archbishop Burke made the Spiritual Exercises twice during the course of his formation. He knew this prayer of self-offering by heart. It formed the pattern of his thought. It structured his outlook and his responses. This is an important part of the background and explanation as to how he could leave his home and comfortable surroundings here and consent to come to a strange place to shoulder the mantle of leadership and to embrace the yoke of the Gospel as Bishop of Nassau.

When asked to go, he went. He was a man of God who was a man for others. His committed personal response to God’s love showed itself clearly when he stood before the Bahamian faithful for the first time as Bishop and declared: “Your joys will be my joys and your pains will be my pains too.”

When the time came, even though he was comfortable, well-adjusted and highly-regarded among us in The Bahamas, as he was called to another assignment, he moved on. He returned here to his native Kingston, Jamaica. “Whenever the Church asked something of me I have never refused.” I heard him say. “Nor have I ever asked any special favor in return.”

Such was the way of a man whose faith was ingrained at his mother’s knees formed and deepened by the Suscipe of St. Ignatius of Loyola and who could embrace as his Episcopal motto the words “Jesus is Lord.”

He was a man of faith. Yet he was deeply convinced that faith is to be lived out in this world. Earlier in this liturgy we heard some fitting words from the Prophet Isaiah. These words were first spoken to those on return from that significant biblical event called the Exile. It is perhaps less well known than the classic story of liberation we know as the Exodus but it is no less significant.

Isaiah is addressing a people divided, discouraged and deported from their homeland. He is offering a word that will rouse them. “The spirit of the Lord is upon me ...He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted. To proclaim liberty to captives ...to comfort all who mourn.”³

These words from Isaiah’s Book of Consolation are quoted at the start of the public ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. They describe the mission and ministry of Jesus. If Jesus is Lord then faith must express itself in bringing glad tidings to the lowly.

Archbishop Burke was convinced of this. For that reason he was very much attuned to the issues in our community. He was very much inclined to respond to social needs. The Church’s tradition of social thought and the call to promote the common good were much at the heart of his pastoral strategy. For him that was the core of what it meant to be like the Good Shepherd who is prepared to lay down his life for his sheep. The deepest motivation of the Good Shepherd is for all to have life and have it more abundantly.⁴

It was a particular pleasure for me, last October, to be able to dedicate the administration building of a new high school in honor of Archbishop Burke. He took the occasion to remind us that our efforts in education express our conviction that education is the way to true liberation and development for our people.

If we attend closely to his words and his example we will better understand the meaning of faith, justice, and true human development. This

³ Isaiah 61:1-3.

⁴ John 10:10.

is particularly important for our small developing nations so freighted with challenges yet so filled with possibilities and potential.

“Jesus is Lord” is an interior disposition which must express itself in action. The depth of our faith is given its proper expression in the way we live and the values we uphold in our community. The authentic religious intention is recognized by its roots as well as its fruits. Archbishop Burke’s life was an ongoing example of this for us.

By vocation he was a teacher. He taught us many lessons. One very important lesson he taught us was the need for discipline in the use of our resources. He was by no means a wasteful man. He did not squander resources. He lived a simple life. He exercised great stewardship of our resources. In doing so he taught us how to accomplish much by using our resources well.

There is something else he taught us. On this occasion we must recall it and never forget it. Because of his lengthy illness, his death cast a long shadow before itself. Yet never once did I hear him complain about his condition. Never did he allow himself to wallow in self-pity. We commend him to God. As we do so we recall with admiration the noble, dignified and faith-filled way in which he endured his years of illness.

Surely, both in sickness and in health, both in life and in the face of death, he was for us, an excellent example of faith, of leadership and of humanity at its finest.

The Letter to the Romans informs us that “...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”⁵ To believe that Jesus is Lord is to believe in his victory over death. Our dear Archbishop Burke often spoke of the “sure

⁵ Romans 10:9.

hope of the resurrection.” This belief certainly enabled him to be courageous in life, as we knew him to be, and courageous in the face of death as well. He knew that courage is the house where hope lives. And hope is often the only saving virtue for us in the challenges of life. His courage drove him to proclaim the Word of truth often, whether convenient or inconvenient.⁶

To know him, to know his example and to leave it there is not enough. To do so would amount to having had a privileged experience but then missing the meaning of it. We must not be content just to have known him. We must learn from his example and follow it too. Like Archbishop Burke we too must understand what it means to say, “Jesus is Lord.” Like him it must make all the difference for us. His legacy is the excellent example he gave us. Our gratitude is to follow his example.

“Take, Lord receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given all to me. To you, O Lord I return it. All is yours dispose if it wholly according to your will. Give me only your love and your grace, for this is sufficient for me.” I will never hear these words again without thinking about Archbishop Lawrence Aloysius Burke.

Pain at parting is the price we pay for love and friendship in this world. This is a moment of grief. Yet it is also a moment of gratitude. We were all graced to have had our lives touched by his own. May God grant him eternal rest. May he rest in peace.

⁶ II Timothy 4:1ff.