

Homily - Mass of the Neophytes 2008

April 30th, 2008

Readings

Acts of the Apostles 17:15, 22-18:1

Psalms 148: 1-2, 11-14

John 16: 12-15

Beloved in Christ:

As we gather for what we call the Mass of the Neophytes let us be mindful of a few things.

Firstly, this is the occasion for the newly baptized to gather with the Archbishop. It is a time for them to be reaffirmed in their membership in the Church. It is an occasion for you Neophytes to develop your sense of participation in the life of the Church and your union with the Archbishop.

I had a similar experience myself recently. I was in Rome for what is known as the visit ad limina apostolorum. This is a requirement for all Bishops to make a personal appearance before the Holy Father once every five years, to give an account of the state of the Diocese in his care. It involves a personal and private audience with the Holy Father as well as the celebration of Mass and the profession of faith at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. This was my first such experience. What a great privilege! What a profound realization that ours is the only Church where this practice exists!

Secondly, tonight's event occurs at the end of Easter Season. I never tire of saying that during the fifty days from Easter to Pentecost the Church invites us, challenges us, indeed urges us to reflect at length on what it means to say and to believe that Christ is risen from the dead.

By custom this celebration was the time when the Neophytes wore their white baptismal robes for the last time. The event was associated with Pentecost. So Pentecost (whose liturgical color is red) got the name "White Sunday." Over time, "White Sunday" was corrupted and shortened to "Whitsunday." The day following was, and still is, called "Whitmonday."

“Whitmonday,” for us, is a public holiday. Its roots lie in the liturgical calendar. Many do not know that. It is related to the end of the Easter Season and the procession of the Neophytes wearing their baptismal white for the last time. Now you know.

Our constant companion at worship during the Easter Season is the Acts of the Apostles. It is a record of the heroic faith which the earliest Christian community lived out under the influence of the resurrection. I often ask myself: If the Acts of Our Apostleship were written today what would it say? Would it commend us or would it condemn us?

In fact, the Acts of Our Apostleship is being written. It is not being written on paper but it is being written in the minds and the thoughts and the observations of those who live with us and work with us. It is being written in the minds, thoughts and impressions of those who observe us and know just how faithful we are to the Gospel we claim to embrace and just how faithful we are to the words and the way of Jesus whom we claim as Christ and Lord.

Today in Acts we find St. Paul addressing a group of unbelievers or at least some who are uncertain of whether or what to believe. He says to them: “[God] made ... the whole human race to dwell on the entire surface of the earth, and he fixed the ordered seasons and the boundaries of their regions, so that people might seek him, even perhaps grope for him and find him, though indeed he is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:26-28) The message is simple really. Faith is fundamental to life.

Later in Acts we find St. Paul saying: “Keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, in which you tend the church of God that he acquired by his own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come among you, and they will not spare the flock. And from your own group, men will come forward perverting the truth to draw the disciples away after them. So be vigilant and remember that for three years night and day, I unceasingly admonished each of you with tears. And now I commend you to God and to that gracious word of his that can build you up and give you the inheritance among all who are consecrated.” (Acts of the Apostles 20:28-32) These words are addressed to the leaders of the Church. It is their first duty to keep watch over themselves and over the whole flock. But it is the first

duty of each one of us, great and small, to guard that special treasure which is our faith. We must keep the flame of faith alive in our hearts always and let nothing snuff it out.

The Gospel of John which we heard from tonight has the tone of farewell. Jesus says: "I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth." (John 16:12-13)

Here we have the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Also there is the clear indication to each of you that, though your initial formation will soon end, your ongoing formation will continue until you draw your last breath. These words from the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel of John are placed before us on this occasion of the Mass for the Neophytes. As for you Neophytes, you have completed your catechesis. You have been initiated. You have just about finished your Mystagogia.

You are now about to begin the journey of living as full members of the Church. You are now about to launch out on the adventure of faith, in earnest. Of course, for any journey, you need to set your destination, pack your bags and say your goodbyes.

Your destination is clear. It is the life of GRACE in this world and the life of GLORY beyond this world. The life of GRACE and GLORY... that is your destination! Loving God and neighbour is the ticket to this destination.

The bags you have to pack contain the scriptures, the sacraments and the spiritual life of the Church. You should be regular in your attendance at Mass. You should read the scriptures privately, personally and prayerfully. You should participate in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance. Penance, because we sin. Eucharist, because we need all the spiritual nourishment we can get to keep us strong against the ever present temptation to sin.

My dear Neophytes, you should yearn to learn. Yearn to learn all that you can about our faith. You will never learn all that there is to know about our faith on this side of eternity. Learn all you can about our faith and then share it with others... by word and example too.

So we must pack our bags for this journey with the Church in faith. The baggage is the Word of God, the sacraments and the spiritual life of the Church.

Then too we must say our goodbyes. This may be the hardest part of all. It requires the greatest degree of honesty. We have to say goodbye to old ways. We may have to loosen our grips on old relationships which do not mean us well – which draw us away from the life of grace.

We must say goodbye to persons, places and practices which lead us away from our true, final destination which is GRACE and GLORY.

The adventure of faith is a magnificent adventure. It is not always pleasant. It is not always easy. But it is always good. It is always true. It is no wonder then that Jesus in his farewell prayers prayed that his disciples might be confirmed in the truth.

On this occasion, I pray that each of you Neophytes may be confirmed in the truth also. No matter what challenges come your way on the journey of faith, may you always be grasped by the splendor of TRUTH, which is but one manifestation of the HOLY SPIRIT.

Be assured that the risen Lord, whose life you share in by Baptism, will guard you and guide you and keep you and protect you. He will lead you on the road from GRACE to GLORY.

God bless you all.