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Auxiliary Bishop of Denver

Homily/Addresses

Good Friday Homily: “We adore thee, O Christ, and we praise thee...”

Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, Denver, CO, Good Friday, April 10, 2009

"We adore the O Christ, and we praise thee..."

According to the ancient tradition of the Church, Good Friday is the only day of the year when the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is not offered. The celebration of the Eucharist is suspended on all the altars in every Catholic Church throughout the world as we mourn the Passion and Death of the Lord.

Good Friday is a day of prayerful contemplation on the mystery of the cross. And the Church invites us to do this as a community in the Good Friday liturgy which consists of three parts: the liturgy of the Word, including the Passion according to St. John, which we just heard; the Veneration of the Cross, and Holy Communion or what was formerly called the "Mass of the Pre-sanctified" (which consists of the distribution of Holy Communion from Sacred Hosts that have been consecrated or "pre-sanctified" at the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper.)

In our contemplation of the cross we discover the "sign of contradiction." The "cross" is at the heart of the Paschal Mystery. In the words of Saint Paul: "I preach Christ and Him Crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). In the mystery of the cross we have the coming together of apparent disparate opposites: suffering and healing, death and resurrection, defeat and victory, agony and glory.

And yet, they are really not opposites. Self-giving and self-oblation are necessary prerequisites for perfect freedom, and perfect freedom gives rise to new life and glory.

I think one of the most powerful and mysterious lines in Mel Gibson's popular movie: *The Passion of the Christ*, is the scene where our Lord meets his dear Mother along the Way of the Cross. As she comes to his side when he falls, yet another time, under the weight of the cross, our Lord looks into her compassionate and sorrowful eyes he tells her: "Don't you see, Mother, I make all things new." Now these words are not found in the Gospel, but are actually found in the Book of the Apocalypse (Rev. 21:5), and the film maker superimposes these words on the lips of Jesus for dramatic effect. Nonetheless, the scene conveys a powerful and mysterious truth.

Through humility and obedience to the will of God, we make all things new. The glory of Jesus, particularly in Saint John's gospel, is the glory of obedience and self-giving. The glory of the Resurrection merely crowns the glory which Jesus already obtained by his obedience to his Father's will.

In the words of our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI: "[Christ's] crucifixion is his coronation; his coronation or kingship is the surrender of himself to men."

The holy martyrs of our faith believed this. Some of you know I recently returned from Guadalajara, Mexico, after spending six weeks in a Spanish language course. During my time in Guadalajara, I learned that many of the Mexican martyrs of the early 20th century Mexican Revolution, came from this region of western Mexico, from the states of Jalisco, Michuacan and Zacatecas and other western states, where the Cristeros movement began. In fact, our seminarians from Saint John Vianney Seminary here in Denver are staging their annual play on this remarkable story at the beginning of May - please come! (May 1 and May 2 at 7:30 p.m. in the refectory)

Most of these Mexican martyrs were either beatified or canonized by Pope John Paul II and Pope

Benedict XVI. One of the most fascinating figures in this whole epic drama, was a young married layman, Blessed Jose Anacleto Gonzales Flores. Blessed Anacleto was a lawyer/scholar who founded the Catholic Action organization entitled "Unión Popular". When the popular resistance to the persecution of the Church began to take up arms in opposition to the oppressive government regime, Blessed Anacleto chose to passively resist the evil by leading his followers to sure martyrdom, knowing that this was the way to true freedom and ultimate victory. Blessed Anacleto was beatified on November 20, 2005, by Pope Benedict XVI, among the first beatifications of the new pontificate. Blessed Anacleto's cause was actually held up for a time because he was so close to the leaders who did take up arms in violent resistance to the evil. But it soon became clear that Blessed Anacleto chose another way.

From Bailey's famous history of the Cristeros movement entitled, "Viva Cristo Rey", we have these words of Blessed Anacleto Flores in a speech he gave to his followers:

"If one of you should ask me what sacrifice I am asking of you in order to seal the pact we are going to celebrate, I will tell you in two words: your blood. If you want to proceed, stop dreaming of places of honor, military triumphs, braid, luster, victories and authority over others. Mexico needs a tradition of blood in order to cement its free life tomorrow. For that, my life is available, and for that tradition I ask yours." (Bailey, Viva Cristo Rey! pg 110).

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we are all called to have the same mind as Blessed Anacleto. Our glory does not come from trophies, honors, or worldly recognition. Our glory begins when we give ourselves as Jesus did. Our glory continues when we have faith enough to do the Father's will, in spite of opposition and suffering.

No one can ever conquer the person who humbles himself to serve God with all his heart, mind and soul. Even if he should suffer death in the process.

Our glory will be consummated when we follow Jesus and hand over our spirit to our heavenly Father in our death.

Then our glory will be completed when he raises us up together with His Son.

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you
...because by your holy cross you redeemed the world.