



HIV/AIDS & Hepatitis C Awareness Mass

Denver, November 5, 2009

First of all, on behalf of Archbishop Charles Chaput, the Archbishop of Denver, my brother priests, deacons, Fr. Tom Carzon, I would like to welcome all of you to Holy Ghost Catholic Church, a beautiful spot in downtown Denver, to this special Mass for those living with HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C and to those caregivers, family members, friends, and anyone affected by HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C.

We also remember, in a special way, our brothers and sisters who have gone to their eternal rest as a result of this disease, may they rest in peace.

In our first reading for today's Mass we hear St. Paul writing to the Romans. St. Paul wrote this letter from Corinth in Greece, which was an extremely important province of the Roman Empire. It was a real crossroads between the east and the west and anyone traveling to Rome from the east very likely passed through Corinth. Paul is writing in about 58 AD and when Nero, the Roman Emperor was rising to power. He eventually banished the Jews from Rome and many found their way to Corinth, being Roman citizens, like Paul.

A number of these Roman Jews became Christians and St. Paul is addressing his messages to them. He is telling them and us that in life and death we belong to the Lord. Each one of us will stand before the judgment seat of God, and we must give an account of our lives before Him who sees and knows all things. The month of November is a time of the year when we take a good hard look at the Last Things, death, judgment, heaven and hell.

When we go before the Lord in the final judgment he will look into our heart and judge us as to what we did in our lives with what we were given. To each of us the Lord lavishes abundant grace. If we tried to live for him to the best of our ability in his grace, we have no reason to fear, "But each one of us will one day give an account before God."

And the Lord wants us to succeed! He does everything he can to put the odds in our favor. Today's gospel teaches to what length the Lord will go, to even save one sinner. He will risk everything to save one soul, even the 99 righteous souls, just to save the one sinner.

As Jesus says, "there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who have no need of repentance."

This parable begins with the Pharisees objecting to the fact that Jesus is dining with sinners, with the publicans, with the outcasts of society. We know that Jesus never shunned any group and those who were most alienated from society, he made it a point to reach out to them.

A few weeks ago, in St. Peter's Square, Pope Benedict XVI canonized five new saints, one being St. Damien de Veuster, Damien the leper saint of Molokai in the Hawaiian Islands, on October 11.

Fr. Damien, a missionary priest, who left his native Belgium to serve the lepers on the island of Molokai, the outcast and abandoned, to reach out and comfort them in their suffering.

In a letter to the Holy Father two days before the canonization, President Barack Obama, who was largely raised in Hawaii, issued this statement: "Father Damien challenged the stigmatizing effects of the disease, giving voice to the voiceless and ultimately sacrificing his own life to bring dignity to so

many."

The President drew parallels between leprosy and diseases such as HIV/AIDS that afflict millions around the world today, saying, "We should draw on the example of Father Damien's resolve in answering the urgent call to heal and care for the sick."

This is the kind of zeal we all need in our hearts to reach out to those who are suffering and in need.

To see the face of Jesus in every person, particularly in face of the poorest of the poor, in the outcast and in the abandoned.

We are grateful to the Missionaries of Charity who for so long have ministered to those dying of AIDS at Seton House and who continue their mission of mercy at the homeless shelter for women next to St. Joe's parish.