

Confidence in God's Love

Healing Mass – Dec 14, 2013

St. Paul describes his experience of being an Apostle in Corinth in the following way (1 Cor 2:2):
“I did not come with sublimity of words or of wisdom, for I resolved to know nothing...except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

“To know...Jesus Christ...Crucified” is to know the worth of every human being. Jesus' suffering and death on the Cross reveal how far God will go to defend the dignity of each person and to rescue us from the shadow of death. Out of love of Jesus and all whom He loves, we celebrate this healing Mass, and we pray for those who have been abused by members of the Church or by others in society. We also pray for members of their families and their friends, that they may know the peace of Christ which surpasses all understanding.

Human beings are made in God's image; male and female He created us. To look on the face of any man, woman or child is to be reminded of the heavenly Father who created us, and of the great worth of each human person (Cf. Gen 1:28).

But how easily we can lose sight of God's image in others. This happens in the sin of sexual abuse. The abuser violates the dignity of the person he abuses; and the person abused finds it very difficult to believe thereafter in his or her own dignity, and also difficult still to believe in the love of God. This is why sexual abuse is a grave evil. And this is why the Church strives to bring Christ's healing to whomever has suffered from abuse.

Allow me now to say a few words in Spanish and then a few more words in English.

Las Sagradas Escrituras no esconden los sufrimientos de Jesús, ni los de su Madre Maria, ni los de sus seguidores. En el episodio de la agonía de

Jesús en el jardín, se ve que el dolor de Jesús era tan fuerte que **“el sudor caía a tierra como grandes gotas de sangre (Lk 22:44).”** Sin embargo, el Señor vivía el proceso entero con una actitud de amor filial por su Padre y amor por todo miembro de la familia humana, cada uno hecho en la semejanza de Dios, su Criador.

Con el Evangelio según San Juan, recordamos la escena al pie de la Cruz. Junto a Jesús estaba su madre dolorosa, la Virgen Maria. Estando allí, Maria estaba presente en el momento más importante en la historia humana, el momento de Nuestra salvación. Fue el momento cuando el Hijo de Dios ofreció al Padre celestial el sacrificio de amor que ha redimido todo el mundo y ha restaurado la dignidad humana a toda persona.

En esta Misa, estamos reunidos en la presencia del Señor Jesús y su Madre para rezar por todas las personas que han sufrido mucho, por las víctimas del

abuso en la Iglesia, y por todos los sobrevivientes del abuso en la sociedad, junto con sus familias y sus amigos. En la celebración de los sagrados misterios de la Eucaristía, ponemos los sufrimientos y dolores de nuestros hermanos en las manos de Jesús, pidiendo la gracia de reconciliación y vida nueva.

Los sufrimientos de Jesús, aceptados por amor, son como el centro esencial del Evangelio, el punto principal del mensaje cristiano. Por eso, nosotros no estamos muy lejos de Cristo cuando sufrimos, más bien somos muy cerca del Señor, el Salvador. Por eso, el Apóstol San Pablo escribe a los Romanos (8:35ff), **“¿Quién nos podrá separar del amor de Cristo? ¿El sufrimiento, o las dificultades, o la persecución, o el hambre, o la falta de ropa, o el peligro, o la muerte? ...Pero en todo esto salimos más que vencedores por medio de aquel que nos amo. Estoy convencido de que nada podrá separarnos del amor de Dios.”**

En esta Misa, en comunión con todo el pueblo de Dios, pedimos perdón por nuestros pecados y por los abusos hechos por miembros de la Iglesia. Al mismo tiempo, tengamos confianza en Cristo y su promesa de estar con nosotros, todos los días hasta el fin del mundo. Donde esta Cristo, allí esta la paz, allí esta la esperanza y la vida. Donde esta Cristo, allí esta también su Madre dolorosa, la Reina de Paz, rezando por todos nosotros.

On this 14th day of December, the Church celebrates the feast of St. John of the Cross, who died at midnight 422 years ago today in AD 1591. Well known for his poetry and other writings, John served as spiritual director for St. Teresa of Avila and other religious and laity in Spain. He is one of 35 doctors of the Church, and is best known for his teaching on “the dark night of the soul” and the “dark night of the senses.” These writings still speak forcefully to us today, for they were forged in the crucible of

sufferings he experienced as a Carmelite friar, where he faced unjust conditions so desperate and heartbreaking that only the intervention of Christ could rescue him. John was imprisoned by his own Carmelite confreres in a monastery in Toledo, Spain; in a monastic cell that was about 6' by 10', with only a very small opening in the wall allowing light to enter. It was freezing cold in the winter and stiflingly hot in the summer. He survived on a diet of bread, water and sardines. Yet, it was there in the dark cell where John composed his most beautiful poetry, most notably "The Ascent of Mount Carmel." It was this poetry that deeply impacted the life of Blessed John Paul II and served as a constant encouragement for him during the bitter suffering imposed on the Polish people in the middle of the 20th century.

In the more than 4 centuries since John's death, his writings have helped countless men and women to discover again the love of God and to restore their

trust in Him. They have been a great help to many who have suffered grave injustices such as sexual abuse. St. John of the Cross says there are “two dark nights”: the dark night of the senses, and the dark night of the soul.

The dark night of the senses refers to the experience of losing confidence in love, of feeling like our love of others, including God, has vanished; the experience of becoming disillusioned with our ability to love or to be loved.

This dark night of the senses is often evidenced in a loss of interest in the daily routines of life, in difficulties in relationships with spouse or child or other family members, in bouts with depression that undercut our sense of purpose and meaning. During the dark night of the senses, we are tempted to think: “If God loved me, He would not make me suffer like this.” But John of the Cross discovered that it is precisely in this unusual way that the Lord tests those

He loves so as to make their love grow deeper and stronger. He writes: “This is the love of God at work. This is how love is tested, tempered and proven true.” It is in the dark night of the senses that we learn the meaning of Jesus’ words (Lk 14:27), **“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”**

By the dark night of the soul, John meant an even deeper testing of the human spirit: the feeling of being utterly forsaken by God, the questioning of whether one’s life has been built on a solid foundation or whether it actually rests on quicksand. Great saints like Mother Teresa of Calcutta faced these painful questions. So did St. John the Baptist, who, after a life of preaching in the desert of Judah, preparing the way for Christ, began to wonder during his imprisonment by King Herod whether his life and ministry had all been for naught. He sent his disciples

to Jesus to ask Him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” St. John of the Cross said: *“This dark night of the soul is heart-wrenching and sheer torment, but it is allowed by God for the sake of love. It is the way the soul is freed from selfishness...and led to full surrender to God’s love.”*

St. John of the Cross knew well that it is hard to trust in God when our heart is broken or assailed by doubts, when our faith in Him is put to the test. It is especially hard for those who have been abused by a member of the Church; and when such abuse becomes known, it is hard for members of their family to trust still in the love of Christ, and in His presence in the Church.

Yes, difficult but not impossible, for nothing is impossible for God. Jesus, who died on the Cross to redeem us, and who is always close to the broken-hearted, says, **“Come to me, all you who labor and**

are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest.” At this Mass, we are one with St. John of the Cross and the Blessed Virgin Mary, in praying for you who are survivors of sexual abuse. We wish to stand in solidarity with you and with your families. We also pray for those who have perpetrated the abuse, that they will repent and make amends for their sins.

We pray, too, that God will help all of us to trust in His love when our faith is tested by the dark night of the senses and the dark night of the soul. The peace that our hearts long for is a peace the world cannot give. But this peace was poured forth from the side of Jesus as He died on the Cross. This peace of His comes to us especially through the Eucharist. This is why we pray, “Lamb of God, who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us and grant us peace.”