



**The Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of
Saint John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and Malta**
USA Associations

2020 Champion Virtual Pilgrimage

Closing Mass Homily of Most Reverend David L. Ricken, DD, JCL,, ChC, Bishop of Green Bay
(transcribed from audio)

Apparition Chapel, National Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help, Champion Wisconsin
Saturday, August 8, 2020

It is such a joy to be with all of you here from our Green Bay Area, Order of Malta, and those who are joining us from around the country. I sure wish all of you could be here, but we're under very unprecedented times, aren't we? It takes an adjustment, but certainly through prayer, through the gift of live streaming, we're able to join one another in praising God wherever you are. Hopefully you're together with one of the groups in your area, or if not that you're at home and praying with us during this mass and also the opportunity to make a spiritual communion if not a physical communion coming to Mass. So, it's a joy to be with you. I wanted to mention that today is the feast of Saint Dominic, a great reformer in the church. And he was born in the year 1170 in Caleruega, Spain, and joined the Augustinian canons.

You know, the Augustinians are probably the oldest order in the church. Going back to the time of St. Augustine Saint Augustine knew that it wasn't good for Christians and believers to be alone. And some men joined him, became priests, had a community where they started to live the gospel day by day, sharing their resources and proclaiming the gospel wherever they were. While preaching against the Albigensian heresy in France, he saw the need for solid preachers of the Gospel who would be fortified by study, strengthened in prayer and confirmed in poverty. So even back at the time of Saint Dominic in the 12th century, they needed strong preachers. Preachers who were very connected to the Gospel and studied and prayed over theology, who knew the tradition, how important that was then, and still is today. The men who followed Dominic in this new form of religious life became known as the Order of Preachers.

So, their primary emphasis is meditating on the Word and preaching within mass, outside of mass, all the opportunities for preaching. Their nickname is the Dominican's named after Dominic. In his 1216 Bull approving the order, Pope Honorius III looked to Dominic and Dominic's brethren as "the future champions of the faith and the true lights of the world." Speaking of lights today, we know how dark things are becoming, don't we, and we know that

the fear that people are experiencing is worse than the virus itself. And so, we need to be cautious, but do not be afraid. That's a hard place to find. And so hopefully as time goes on and we begin to make the necessary adjustments, we will get beyond this. I know we will. God does not abandon his church. And we're learning a lot as we go along. At least I am, I hope you are too.

We speak God's wisdom from the first reading, "mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory and which none of the rulers of this age knew. For if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory." So, the wisdom of the world doesn't serve truth. Often, it serves a very temporary passage through life. But without an understanding of what this life is about, of our eternal destiny, it is pretty bankrupt. And soon the culture goes South. We see some of those signs today, don't we? With all kinds of violence happening, people destroying properties and murders and all kinds of things happening. It's a kind of an evil rampage. So, what was meant to be something good - looking at disparities, between and among peoples of different colors and cultures - has been hijacked by people who have another agenda.

What is God's view for us? How does God see us? "What eye has not seen and what ear has not heard and what has not entered the human heart, is what God has prepared for those who love him." 30, 40, 50, 60 years, life is short. Life is fragile. None of us is here forever. And I hope you're saying, thank God for that. So, it's important that we stay in a state of grace. That we go to confession frequently. That you seek out a deeper knowledge and understanding of the Word. And you long for the day when we can return to reception of the Eucharist. Things are opening up in this part of the country. I hope they are in yours as well. So instead of focusing on what we don't have, maybe we should try focusing on all the gifts we do have. Meditating on the Word of God is called Lectio Divina.

The Dominican's, the monks. They do this all day long. Appreciating that. Learning to pray together as a family the Rosary. Here we are in Our Lady of Good Help Shrine and praying the Rosary daily is the greatest weapon against all the enemies and tools of the devil. Developing a family prayer life is incredibly important. So, all these things, I hope you're learning as I am that we have so much wealth in the Catholic church. Of course, we long for the fullness of the Eucharist, but I must say in the last years, our lives have gotten so fast. So frenetic. And people have been bringing that into church. I call it "slide by genuflections". Just in case they may be right that Jesus is really here. That's no way to come into the sacred space. You and I know that. Jesus shouldn't be treated this way. This is not a wafer of a host. This is the real presence, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. Every day, heaven comes to earth. You and I have no right to it.

It's a gift. So be grateful for the gift. Repent to the Lord of the times that we've taken this gift for granted and say, "Lord, forgive me. I repent of my attitude that I deserve it". We don't deserve anything. Everything and especially the gift of the Eucharist is just that - it's gift. So, in this journey, through this pandemic, which is very hard, and it divides people from people, and

we miss the communion, not just of receiving the Holy Eucharist in communion, but the communion of our community of faith. We need to long for that, to pray for it, and to thank God for the victory. The victory of being able to return to Mass fully someday. And to later on, understand what this has been all about. You know, we don't understand things beforehand or even right in the middle of them. But later on, we say, "Oh Lord, I see what you're doing. I understand."

When this thing first started, I remember saying to the Lord, "Father, what in heaven's name are you doing? I don't understand." And I woke up with the words directly, I think, from the Father, he said, "I am cleaning house." Springtime. I am cleaning house. Boy, he's having to dig deep. Isn't He? So, you know, a frenetic pace of life is not good. We need time to be contemplative, not to focus on what we don't have, but be totally present in the present moment. You see, God doesn't live in the past. He's the God of the past. God doesn't live in the future. He's the God of the future. He lives in the present moment. The more we live present to the presence of God in the present moment, the more our union with God will grow. And the more one day when we return to the Eucharist, we will be repentant and approach it, not saying it's something we deserve, but as pure gift. And we should let the Holy spirit fashion us, draw us, purify us, burn us of self-interest and long for the gift of the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus. You know, in the Gospel, chapter nine of Luke, "I will follow you wherever you go. Jesus answered him. Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head." Most of us in the United States are spoiled. At least we have a place to lay our heads. Much of the world - homeless, no food, helpless, thrown out of their countries, taken advantage of, trafficked.

"Lord, let me go first and bury my father." There's an urgency from the Gospel. "Let the dead bury their dead." Was he saying not to bury the dead? No. He said, come on. Let's go. Urgency. "But you go and proclaim the Kingdom of God." Let me ask you, brothers and sisters. When was the last time you introduced somebody to Jesus? So be a friend of Jesus, make a new friend, introduce your new friend to Jesus. Gradually you can bring them to church, accompany them to church. Gradually you can help them prepare for the sacraments. That's an accompaniment journey, but the Lord sends all kinds of people into your life for a reason. Don't miss the opportunities.

"Another one says, let me say farewell to my family at home. He said, no. No one sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the Kingdom of God." So, I went to see my grandfather and grandmother in Pueblo, Colorado, La Junta, when I was young. I would go out with them onto the farmland and my grandpa had a little plow there and had a horse. This was a long time ago. And he said, "now young man", he says, "keep your eyes focused ahead. If you look back, the furrow will get all off, be crooked, go this way or that way." That's what this is about. Keep your eye focused ahead. What's the next step. And the next step. And the next step.

Don't get ahead of yourself. Don't get ahead of the Holy Spirit. Don't get ahead of the Blessed Mother. Just ask for the next step. When the bishops of Region Seven were with the Holy Father in December. December 12th. And I asked the Pope a question. I said, "you know, we're really engaged in trying to learn and do missionary discipleship." And I said, "it's difficult because people have a hard time rethinking who they are as a follower of Jesus." I said, "what role, Holy Father, do you think the Holy Spirit should play?" He looked at me very intensely. "That's an insightful question," he said, "the Holy spirit is extremely important.

Pray over and study the Acts of the Apostles. The Holy Spirit won't give you the whole picture. He'll just give you the next step. Take the next step. And after you take that next step, the next step after that will be revealed." You see this is a journey. It's a journey. And as you know, you who have been on so many pilgrimages. Think of Lourdes and all the people you accompany as you go and accompany them to the healing waters in the Springs in Lourdes. You accompany them with such great love and devotion. But if you get ahead of yourself, or ahead of the person you're with, your Malade, an accident is going to happen. You have to be right with them. Right at the time. Don't get too far ahead. Don't drag behind. That's like the journey of life, isn't it? That's what St. Dominic learned. That's what our families have to learn. Don't get ahead of the Lord. This moment is precious. We don't deserve the next moment or the next breath. It's all pure gift. So, don't waste any time. And the more time you spend with Jesus. The more time you walk with Mary and Joseph as the Holy Family. The more you will be rewarded. Then when it's time to go back to the reception of the Holy Eucharist, which we starve for. We long for. We'll be really receptive. What a gift.