

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
SATURDAY OF THE ELEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME
MEMORIAL OF SAINT JOHN FISHER AND SAINT THOMAS MORE, MARTYRS
SECULAR ORDER OF DISCALCED CARMELITES CONGRESS
DOUBLE TREE HOTEL, ONTARIO, CALIFORNIA, JUNE 22, 2019

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis and assure you of His Holiness' prayers and spiritual closeness as you gather to reflect on the theme: *Secular Carmelites: Radiating Gratitude and Love*. I thank your Provincial Delegate, Father Matthew Williams, as well as his predecessor, Father Donald Kinney, for the invitation to be with you during these days.

Today, the Church celebrates the Memorial of Saint Thomas More and Saint John Fisher, martyrs of the English Reformation. They gave witness to the Lord in their fidelity not only to the truth about marriage but also in their fidelity to the Church, founded upon the confession of faith of Saint Peter. Both upheld the dignity of conscience. Both suffered for their Catholic faith, and both wear the martyr's crown. The Church in this country prays in a special way this week that greater respect will be shown for religious liberty, so that all may worship and carry out their apostolates in accordance with the dictates of conscience and their faith.

Catholics are no strangers to religious persecution, but at times, not all have had the courage and commitment of the martyrs to give faithful, public witness. Moreover, even when we do have courage, our interior attitude in the face of suffering is not always as it should be, at least not as Saint Paul describes it when he writes: *Therefore, I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong*. We should be content or "happy" with sufferings *for the sake of Christ*. True greatness and the virtue of perseverance in suffering are seen in relationship to the Crucified One.

In today's world, we tend not to speak about our weaknesses; rather, we tend to speak about our strengths and all that we have accomplished. We boast of our merits. We are self-referential. St. Thomas More could have boasted that he was Chancellor of the Realm. Saint John Fisher could have boasted that he was the best theologian among the English Bishops or that he was the only one who refused to sign the Oath of Supremacy recognizing Henry VIII as head of the Church. They did not. Saint Paul could have boasted in his knowledge of the Law or in all the churches and communities he established. Instead, he boasted of his weakness rather than his merits. The saints are not self-referential; rather, they refer everything to God.

Certainly, this was the attitude adopted by St. Thérèse, who wrote:

"I shall take care not to present any merits of mine, but only those of our Lord. As for me, I shall have nothing. I do not want to present anything. I prefer to let God love me as much as He wants ... It is because of this that I shall get such a good reception!"

In the Gospel, Jesus invites his disciples to consider the birds, the wild flowers, the lilies of the field. The birds are fed by the hand of the Father. The wild flowers grow, without working or spinning,

and the Heavenly Father clothes the grass of the field in beauty. Jesus wants his disciples to rely on Divine Providence, allowing God to love them as He chooses. Certainly, God's words to Saint Paul – *My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness* – remind us of this. Relying on God's grace, we can seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness.

The key to the triumph of the martyrs was in recognizing their littleness and God's greatness. Blessed Marie-Eugene of the Child Jesus, said of Saint Paul:

Paul was a man, a vigorous man, powerful in every way, yet Saint Paul would say, 'It is by God's grace that I am what I am.' It is hard to believe that Saint Paul, who worked so hard and was able to do so much, as he himself said, could say this. He would have had so many reasons to boast – I did this. I did that. But he was careful not to boast of his wealth, recognizing that all that he did could be swept away. It is nothing before God. "I want to know one thing; that is Christ Crucified. I have only one right, one wealth: my infirmity and my weaknesses. And if it is necessary that I boast, I will boast in my weaknesses." (Blessed Marie-Eugene of the Child Jesus, *La joie de la miséricorde*, Nouvelle Cité, 2008, 102-103)

Once more in today's First Reading, Paul reiterates: *I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me.* In recognizing our nothingness before God, we open ourselves to His power – to the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit – to accomplish great things in us for God's glory, for the sake of the Kingdom. Today's readings invite us to consider our littleness and our weaknesses and to place greater trust in God's power to heal, to strengthen, and to save.

We are weak. We cannot do everything on our own. We need God in our lives. Saint John Fisher reminds us that "A good man is not a perfect man. A good man is an honest man, faithful, and unhesitatingly responsive to the voice of God in his life."

Just as Saint Paul responded to God's call to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, Saint John Fisher understood the need daily to listen to God's voice and to respond. The virtue of fortitude was built in him each day, so that in his moment of trial, he could give his testimony that God is to be loved above all else. I imagine that while in prison, he dedicated himself to fervent prayer and took great consolation from his friendship with God. Similarly, Thomas More's daily fidelity to God, especially to his conscience, where he heard the voice of God resound, allowed him to say, "I am the King's good servant, but God's first."

Rather than seeking worldly respect, wealth, and power, they sought first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, not thinking much of themselves, but think more of the love of God and the promise of eternal life. Today's Gospel began: *No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon."*

Inspired by the example of the martyrs and asking for their intercession, let us renew our commitment, even in our weakness, to serve the one, true Master and Lord and to seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, in hope of the promise of eternal life.