

3rd Sunday of Lent, 2008

“Yea rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.”
(Luke 11:28)

From the moment of His baptism in the Jordan; Jesus, led by the Spirit, entered that battle in which He was pitted against Satan; at the time of His Passion, He entered on the final combat, but victory was assured to Him: “For the prince of this world cometh, and in Me he hath not anything.” Our Lord Himself summed up His whole work as the definitive victory over Satan: “Now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to myself.”

Thus our Lord's whole mission is set before us as a struggle with and a victory over Satan. During these “Holy Forty Days” of Lent the Church could not fail to emphasise this — because each one of us must face a similar lifetime's struggle against the evil one; and our victory lies in obedience to God the Father when He proclaimed: “This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased — hear ye Him.”



Now we are almost half-way through the Holy Season of penance; and our Lord Himself has told us: “Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.” How deeply have we immersed ourselves in the “living word of God” since Lent began? We have no excuse, for it is Christ Himself who admonishes us. In what measure have we devoted ourselves to an increased knowledge of God in Jesus Christ and His passion and death? Every day, the official prayer of the Church opens with the *Invitatory*, “Let it not be vain for you to rise early before it is light;” and the prophet Isaias tells the Church to “Cry out full-throated and unsparingly, lift up your voice like a trumpet blast; tell My people their wickedness;” and God, speaking to us repeatedly, through the prophet Joel: “Return to Me with your whole heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning; rend your hearts and not your garments, says the Lord Almighty;” and using the same prophet Joel: “Between the porch and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep and say: ‘Spare, O Lord, spare Thy people, and make not Thy heritage a reproach with the nations ruling over them.’” As St Paul tells us it is the acceptable time; it is a time in which Christ draws all things to Himself; He renews the face of the earth; but that renewal begins with the renewal of our own souls in the spiritual life — it is for us to take the means offered by our Saviour through His Church.

You remember the parable of the wise and foolish virgins; the foolish took their lamps but did not take oil with them — and so they were not ready to meet the Bridegroom; they lacked wisdom. In the book of Wisdom we read: “For Wisdom is an infinite

treasure to men! — which they that use, become the friends of God, being commended for the gift of discipline ... He [God] is the guide of Wisdom, and the director of the wise.” In my early schooldays, we had to learn the commandments by heart and in the Catechism of that time the first Commandment was:

I am the Lord thy God who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make for thyself a graven image, or the likeness of anything that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters under the earth; thou shalt not bow down to them or serve them. It is written: “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve.”

Let us take care not to have a casual or “laid-back” attitude in our approach to the things of God. Let us not think that it is for God to arrange the means of salvation for our convenience. That is very dangerous. Remember St John’s letter to the Church of Laodicea:

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would that thou wert cold or hot. But because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth¹.

The first three commandments place before us our bounden duties to God. Let us examine our way of life to discover how much attention we give to our most important duties — the first and the greatest commandment. Let this come first for the renewal and strengthening of our spiritual life during the next week or so: if we do it well, then this Lent will be one to look back upon joyfully.

Then perhaps we could give some thought to the messages of Fatima — what Our Lady, at Fatima, asks of us. Sister Lucia, telling us of the apparition of Our Lady, and the Child Jesus in the arms of St Joseph, blessing the people during the miracle of the sun, writes: “In times such as the present, when the family seems to be misunderstood in the form in which it was established by God, and is assailed by doctrines that are erroneous and contrary to the purposes for which the divine Creator instituted it, surely God wished to address to us a reminder of the purpose for which He established the family in the world. God entrusted to the family the sacred mission of cooperating with Him in the work of creation; ... A home must be like a garden, where fresh rosebuds are opening, bringing to the world the freshness of innocence, a pure and trusting outlook on life, and the smile of innocent happy children.”

There is so much in her own expansion of the messages of the Immaculate Heart if we ponder what she writes. Ask our blessed Mother to help us to see, hear and understand all that she wishes us to know.

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¹ Revelation 3: 15–16