

COR JESU: AUGUST 22, 2018

HOMILIST - FR. JOHN BURNS

I just got back, a couple of hours ago, from a family vacation. We were up in the north woods at my grandmother and grandfather's old cottage.(and) It's a beautiful, but a really old cottage. There's just an outhouse and a lake; there's no hot water; there's no bathroom, so it was a very simple week.(and) All my family was up there, including my sister and brother-in-law and their two little ones.(and) I got to spend a lot of time, especially, hanging out with my little niece, Monica. She's just adorable. She's about a year-and-a-half and she's real undersized on a percentile so she's just teeny tiny, but she's starting to crawl around and just starting to say words and follow the conversation.(and) I had on, one day, a t-shirt from Cor Jesu. For those of you who've been here kinda since the beginning, that black t-shirt that Sr. Marianne and some others put together which has a beautiful image of the Sacred Heart on it, I had it on this day and little Monica was playing around.(and) I kept going up to her and saying, "Hey Monica, this is the Sacred Heart of Jesus?" (and) Then I'd come up to her later and say, "Hey Monica, where's the Sacred Heart of Jesus?" And, after just one or two tries, she figured it out and kept pointing right at the heart.(and) All through the day she got this right and it was just adorable and I was loving it. Anyway, the next day, I'm laying on the couch just recovering in between activities and just taking a breather and she climbed up and sat down next to me and was just kinda looking at me.(and) So, I decided to just test it.(and) I just was wearing a regular shirt, a plain blue t-shirt. I said, "Hey Monica, where's the Sacred Heart of Jesus?" (and) She looked at my shirt, kind of frowned a little bit, and looked up at me and just stared at me, kind of confused.(and) Then she smiled and she climbed up on me and just laid her head down, right on my heart. I was like, "poof", the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these, "huh." (and) She'd reminded me, in that, of just the way of a child to teach us the simple truth of who we are and of our faith. (and) We know that by Holy Ordination the priest has been conformed to the Heart of Jesus Christ, that his (priest's) heart is now Christ. St. John Vianney said that the heart of the priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus. Little Monica was just reminding me that I have Jesus' heart by ordination.(and) I was dirty, hadn't showered, scruffy gray beard, clothes oh, everything was dirty! I didn't look like a priest, but deep in my heart is a reminder that I am a priest and she was calling me to that and, God forbid, that I would ever forget that. God forbid.

I can't skate around this first reading, you guys; it's a tough one. It's a tough reading from Ezekiel.(and) It's a prophecy against Shepherds who forgot who they were and failed to shepherd rightly and do what was necessary for the flock to flourish and to live well. But, instead they use their office to benefit themselves, thereby, neglecting or harming the flock.(and) How can we not sit with that difficult prophecy from thousands of years ago and not hear it ring true today, as we hear these scandals that the media continuously bring forth to our gaze, day after day, after day? Horrible things that have happened in our church because shepherds have not shepherded rightly. I want to make three points on that because we just can't avoid talking about that even though it's a really intense and heavy topic.(and)

The first point is that when we face a scandal like this, something as appalling as the failure of our shepherds and our pastors to fulfill the sacred dignity of their office, an appropriate response is anger. Anger is a difficult emotion to manage and we tend to always think that anger is bad, but the whole moral tradition of our church, rooted in St Thomas Aquinas, tells us that anger can be righteous and can be a holy response. Aquinas, himself, says that when a personal injustice has occurred the response is anger, righteous anger, because anger is an emotion that wells up in us and leads us, propels us, to do something to correct the wrong, to bring about justice in the face of injustice.(and) So, anger is an appropriate response in the face of the mess and the sin and the filth that has been brought into our church by these shepherds who have not shepherded rightly.

Second point, that there is a good fruit to this righteous anger and that good fruit, for us, has to be prayer and penance, prayer and fasting, prayer and abstinence, because the restoration of justice must happen.(and) That doesn't mean we skip mercy, but we pursue justice and then mercy surpasses justice. There are things that need to be done to restore justice, structures that need to be changed, retributive justice and commutative justice that need to be pursued in the face of sin and crime. And then, there is much work to be done in healing, for those who suffered under these shepherds. But, you and I can't do most of that. You and I cannot really bring about the justice and change the structures and reach into the hearts of these people that we may never meet; we may meet some of them. You and I can't do much of that work. In this powerful passage it's the Lord who says, but that's o.k., I will be the first to do that work. He says very clearly, "Thus says the Lord, I swear I am coming against these shepherds." That's straight from the scripture. First and foremost, it is the Lord who restores justice and will bring about whatever needs to be changed. Secondarily, there will be people that the Lord will use. Those who have authority and those who have the competence to restore justice in criminal matters and restore justice within our church and reach out the healing to those that they can contact and bring back to the heart of the Lord. You and I can't do most of that, but we can participate in that by furthering the initiative, by placing ourselves, our lives, and hearts in the Lord's hands and begging that, by our offerings, that work justice and healing will unfold exactly the way the Lord wants it and without impediment and without delay. By our prayer and penance we can indeed participate in the restoration of justice and in the healing of hearts that have tragically been wounded. Bishop Morlino's letter to his diocese is worth a read. In there he says just like some demons this type of evil can only be opposed by prayer and fasting. We must pray. We must pray for the restoration of justice, for the healing of hearts, for the change that needs to happen wherever it needs to happen, that this does never have to occur again. By prayer and by fasting we are participants and these are good fruits of the righteous response to this grave injustice. Second Point

The third point, is that a necessary virtue is hope, that as we look at the sadness, as we look at the brokenness that is just, frankly, a part of human existence, but it hurts so badly when it happens these ways, we also must beg for the infused virtue of hope, which is a great gift from God to never despair.(and) As we celebrate this Feast of the Queenship of Our Lady, we just go to Mary. We go to Mary knowing that the rosary is one of the most powerful prayers that we have. (and that) By her Queenship with the Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, that she asserts herself to restore order.(and that) She never despaired, even standing at the foot of the cross when all of humanity thought that all

was lost, our lady never despaired. (that) As we look at the mess, and we see friends and family that have been hurt, and many people are discouraged we have to beg for the type of hope that personifies and characterizes the Immaculate Heart of Mary. There is going to be a purification. This is not finished. It's going to go on for a long time. Its gonna cause all of us sadness and pain, crisis of faith. It's gonna hurt, but beneath all the mess, all the stuff on the outside, all the sadness, deep deep deep at the core is a truth that cannot be buried, cannot be hidden, and shall not be forgotten. The church is the bride of Christ and the scriptures say that she is to be a spotless bride.(and) That our work of opposing, even hating, sin is a work of helping to move the church, herself, towards being the spotless bride, as Our Lady desires her to be, so that She can present this beautiful bride, the church, to her Son, Jesus Christ, whose heart was opened. That she, the church, can be cleansed, sanctified, redeemed, saved. Anger is a righteous response to this crisis. An appropriate fruit of that anger is prayer and fasting.(and) A necessary virtue is hope and on this Feast we turn to her, Beautiful Queen, and beg her to lead the way, that only good will come about, that healing will unfold beautifully, that salvation would continue to be won, and the kingdom continue being forwarded, according to the Will of her Son.

So, let's just pray for a moment: Dear Beautiful Queen, our mother, our mama, we are lost in the darkness of our world. We cannot save ourselves and facing sin, scandal, crisis, brokenness there is a temptation to despair and so we look to your Immaculate Heart, beautiful, shining, glorious, holy, zealous and we beg you to guide each and every single one of us toward the light to stand in the fullness of that light which is your son, Jesus Christ, the light of the world. And we beg you to make us instruments fitting for His good work of reform, of transformation, of healing, of sanctifying, of preaching, and proclaiming the great truth the church is meant to proclaim to the ends of the Earth. We need you for this, Mary. We cannot do it on our own. We do not know the way, so work in us, work through us. Work this mighty, mighty, labor of sanctifying, of cleansing, and restoring the church. We ask all of this as we pray together to you our queen. Remember, oh Most Gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence we fly unto thee, oh Virgin of Virgins, our mother. Today, we come before thee. We stand sinful and sorrowful. Oh Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not our petitions but, in thy mercy, hear and answer us, amen.