

HOMILY ORDINARY SUNDAY 05 (Homily 02)

“Called to be *Just* Saints”

(Isaiah 58:6-10; Psalm 112; 1 Cor 2:1-5; Matt 5:13-16)

On Saturday, November 20th, 2010, the Olympic Stadium in Montreal was packed with around 55,000 Catholic faithful, including over 50 bishops. The occasion was the Canadian celebration of the canonization of Bro. André Bessette as the first Canadian male saint. Sickly as a youth, diminutive in stature, lacking in education and holding only the role of porter throughout his years as a Holy Cross brother, he was nevertheless a giant in faith. Known as the miracle man of Montreal for the countless miracles he performed through intercession of his favorite saint, St. Joseph, the thousands gathered to honor him in a facility more accustomed to rock stars and sports heroes.

His story is a gentle reminder that we are all called to be saints. The readings today would add that we are called not just to be saints, but to be *just* saints as well.

In the Gospel today, Jesus is deliberately speaking to his disciples, to his followers whom he has personally chosen. This choice is very unlike the rabbis, who were chosen by their students. Jesus is unique – he chose his disciples and called his apostles to get to know him, and to follow him.

It is clear that the goal of a disciple is to become a saint; to be salt of the earth and light to the world. Eastern spirituality is more accustomed to this view which they call divinization. We are to be filled with the Spirit of Jesus, to become divine, in a very real sense to become God-like.

Jesus himself showed us divinity, what it means to be divine. As the saints of old put it, the Incarnation is a marvelous exchange. Jesus became man so that man might become God. Today we would say that Jesus became one of us, so that we could become Christ-like, like God. This means that we are called to be saints, to be divinized

In the Old Testament, 1 Kings and Ps 132 refer to David as an *anointed lamp* for God’s purposes. Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6 applies that to the descendants of David who will be a lamp to the nations bringing salvation to the ends of the earth. That makes us, baptized believers in Jesus Christ, the new Israel, the new followers of David, called to be saints, to spread salvation to all others. This is the mandate of the Church.

The founder of the Missionary Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, St. Eugene de Mazenod, had this mandate in mind. He taught the members of his new religious missionary congregation to help people to first of all be fully human, then Christians, and finally, to become saints

Bishop Ovide Charlebois OMI, the first bishop of the diocese of Keewatin-Le Pas, took up that teaching of our founder. Charlebois truly believed that his life would be wasted if he did not try to become a saint. He lived that belief in his own heroic life, through hours of prayer and days and months of very arduous missionary activity throughout our vast diocese.

The prophet Isaiah in the first reading speaks strongly about what it means to be salt and light, to be a saint, and adds a deeper dimension to it. Where many think of sainthood only in terms of piety and moral purity, he sees it as a force for justice in the world.

Isaiah's bottom line is that to be a saint is to work for justice, and not just to work for justice, but to try to root out the cause of injustice, to try to change systems of structural injustice. He first of all questions religious practices such as fasting that are self-serving rather than salvific. Isaiah does not mince his words as he declares what genuine, real religion is all about: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, to share our bread with the hungry, to take the homeless into our homes, to clothe the naked, to heal relationships with our families and relatives, and to satisfy the needs of the afflicted. Then and only then will God's light and glory and healing break upon us. In the end, Isaiah picks up the Gospel theme of being saints, and broadens it to be *just* saints, saints who work for justice.

Jesus himself addressed the structural religious systemic injustice of his time. He critiqued religious practices that favored the rich, educated, powerful and healthy, and oppressed the poor, uneducated, powerless and afflicted, by rules and regulations they could not afford and could not keep. His most dramatic gesture in this area was the cleansing of the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Oblate Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation organization is an attempt by the Oblates to live out this gospel and this passage of Isaiah; The late Fr. Daryl Rupiper one who led the way with his missions and retreats teaching parishes in the United States to care more for the poor and the environment. Here is what he wrote to Archbishop Sylvain some years before he died:

I speak of what we believe about the environment as Catholics....I make it clear that there is a crisis....how it came to be....and what can be done about it. On the second weekend a flyer is put into the bulletin....it contains about 40 practical suggestions about what each individual can do....they are encouraged to read it as a family....the following weekend each parishioner receives a commitment sheet on which he/she writes down what they have decided to do to save the planet....and these sheets are held up during a special prayer led by the celebrant at the offertory. They take those commitment sheets home and put them on their fridge or somewhere where they will be reminded of their commitment.

Fr. Ruper was prophetic in his ministry, and someone Isaiah would have been delighted to meet, his kind of saint, a *just* saint. That is our call also.

The Eucharist that we now celebrate is a clarion call to sainthood. We are nourished by the love of God through Word and sacrament, and challenged to live that Word and Sacrament in the world as saints.

So as we celebrate today, let us strive to be not just saints, but *just* saints, working to overcome the causes of injustice in our world, to help build up the reign of God right here and right now.

