



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Homily for School Mass: Feast of St. Bruno

Friday October 7, 2006

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Earlier this week, the church celebrated the feast of a man who can arguably be called the most popular Christian Saint — St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis took the Lord at his word when he said “sell all you have and come follow me” and then preached to the world the power of evangelical poverty. There is no place in the world where his master is preached that hasn’t also heard of the poor man of Assisi.

Today the church commemorates one of her far less well known heroes — St. Bruno. St. Bruno lived at almost the same time as St. Francis, though he is hardly a household name. The words of Christ Bruno heard were “Come away by yourselves and rest a while”, and his great gift to us was the witness of solitude in the pursuit of Holiness.

The religious order founded by St. Francis is among the largest, perhaps the largest in the church, who have worked zealously in schools, parishes, hospitals and universities. The monastic family founded by St. Bruno is the smallest religious order, whose lives are lived in almost total isolation and practically complete silence within their monasteries.

What these great Saints have to tell us is that there is no single way to Christian Holiness, but that the pursuit of it is not optional. Both saints lived for Christ alone, though they sought him in radically different ways. We too must seek to find and serve Christ in the way that pleases him. This is of particular importance for Christians your age. As you move from being children to men, you are obviously much concerned with the future. You have your mind fixed on College, on careers, perhaps even on families. Some of you probably aspire to wealth or even fame. All of us I am sure hope that whatever happens to us, we will be happy.

The decisions you make now and those you will make in the next few years will largely determine the course of much of the rest of your life. Be sure that you make these decisions deliberately. Be sure you try to be guided by Christ, because he has a vocation for each of you, and the extent to which you hear his call and respond to it will determine your happiness.

And when speaking of happiness, please don’t misunderstand me. I’m not talking about the sort of short-term happiness that you might feel after a successful test or a well-fought football game. I’m speaking of that deep down sense of being



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right with God and right with the world that produces in us a sense of peace. This form of happiness is perhaps more rightly called Christian Joy and it makes us able to bear the sufferings and trials that come our way as the result of our own sins and the sins of others. No Christian vocation is real unless it is lived in the shadow of the Cross. St. Francis was given the great grace of bearing in his own body the wounds Christ suffered for him and St. Bruno — like all saints who seek Christ in the desert of solitude had to wrestle with demons, which is why he is the patron of exorcists. He gave his monks a motto “Crux stat dum volvitur orbis” (the Cross stands while the world turns about it) The cross is the true axis of the world even if the world doesn’t know! Or as TS Eliot would have us put it: Christ is “at the still point of the turning world”.

One of the greatest of the 20th century martyrs was that true son of St. Francis — St. Maximilian Kolbe, who offered himself in place of one of his fellow prisoners at Auschwitz and was condemned to a horrible death in a starvation bunker in the worst days of World War II. St. Maximilian, was able to go to his death with peace and serenity, singing hymns because even in that place of evil and darkness Christ brought good out of evil. St. John Houghton was a Carthusian Monk in England during that other reign of terror called the English Reformation. When St. John was ripped from the seclusion of his cloister and then literally ripped apart at Tyburn, he was described by St. Thomas More as going to his death like a bridegroom going to church on his wedding day.

Five years ago yesterday, the shadow of the cross fell particularly heavily over this school and community, when two of our Seniors — Michael Means and David Neukum — were killed in a tragic accident. Today I am offering this Mass for the repose of their souls. We pray also for their families, their friends and their brothers and for all of us who mourn their loss. But even in our sadness, we offer this great sacrifice in the sure faith that by doing so, we bring them to salvation.