

Homily for August 8, 2021

“...unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.”

There are two famous sayings we have from Saint Lawrence. I think maybe we might get tired of hearing them, but then I realize some people will be hearing them for the first time.

[From the OSV’s Encyclopedia of Saints, Revised]

Saint Lawrence was a deacon of Rome and an aide to Pope Saint Sixtus the Second, “...who followed that pontiff in suffering. One of seven such deacons, Lawrence was probably born in Huesca, Spain. Ambrose wrote that Lawrence was overcome with grief when Sixtus the Second was put to death but rejoiced when told that the pope had said that Lawrence would follow him into martyrdom in three days. When the Roman authorities demanded the treasures of the Church, Lawrence showed them the poor and crippled.”

That is where we hear the first of his famous remarks, “These are the treasures of the Church.”

Aquí escuchamos la primera de sus famosos comentarios: "Estos son los tesoros de la Iglesia".

Because Lawrence said this, rather than turning over what the Authorities thought were vast amounts of riches, he was placed on a red-hot grill, where he made his other famous reply.

[From the New Catholic Encyclopedia]

The joke he made to the judge while being tortured to death by being roasted alive on the gridiron is, in Latin, “Assam est; versa, et manduca!” Which is translated “It is well done; turn it over and eat it,” or “He is roasted, turn him and eat him.”

Prudentius reported that Lawrence’s example of faithfulness and humor in death led to the conversion of a Roman.

Lawrence’s martyrdom took place in the year Two Hundred Fifty-eight. The details of his death were known as early as the beginning of the three-hundreds

(the fourth century). Which means within fifty years of his death. His witness was known and written about by Damasus, Ambrose, Prudentius, and Augustine.

What can we learn today from our Patron Saint?

First, the Latin quote to turn him and eat him strikes our ears, especially this month. “Turn him and eat him.” I know I reminded everyone that for five weeks we would be reading from the Gospel According to John, Chapter Six. But these weeks are filled with many other observations. Last week we concentrated more on the Holy Cross Missionaries. This week, on our Patron, with our Gospel from John Chapter twelve. Next Week, the Assumption falls on Sunday, so we will focus our God’s work through our Blessed Mother. Nonetheless, John Chapter Six remind us that Our Lord told us that,

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”

Christians in the first centuries were accused of cannibalism, eating the flesh and drinking the blood of humans, because people picked up bits and pieces of our worship and misunderstood them. This is because from the beginning we were doing what Jesus told us to do – the Mass. Take and eat, take and drink - of Him. It would not have passed Saint Lawrence’s attention, or the attention of the early Christians, that as his death was a sharing in the sufferings of Our Lord, so to the image the Romans had given him – being roasted slowly like a pig - would recall that we are fed by Him who is real food and real drink for a real heavenly existence.

Second, the translation, “it is well done” brings into our minds the words Our Lord gave in a parable. We all hope, at the end of our life, to hear Our King say, “well done, good and faithful servant, enter into your rest.”

Third, just as back then, so also, we today are reminded that our treasures are the poor and the needy. To them we can entrust our goods, for they are more valuable than gold in our eyes.

Fourth, there is the command we are constantly given; to love God with all our being, and our neighbor as ourselves. Lawrence and all the early Christians were so caught up in love of others that their life-style stood out to those around them. The Church grew even in the midst of persecution. People wanted the love and joy that would drive these Christians to care for the weak and their enemies.

They wanted to know the God that that would give them this kind of love. It is a love that continues to convert today. And it is a lack of love that drives people away.

And finally, there is the joy and peace that comes from a relationship with Christ and His Church that allows – in the midst of torturous pain, a humor that would produce a joke which rings throughout the ages. As we pray in the Litany of the Saints, we ask that Christ will look kindly upon the person we are praying for, because they have experienced a death like Christ's. In our Baptism we die and rise with Christ. In the martyrs we see that we can die a death like His if it comes to that. For it is a death which is a doorway to a life even better than Christ has given us now.

Lawrence witnessed to such a joy and peace. Let us go and do the same.

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