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Day of Recollection for Sisters of Life and various other CMSWR Communities
Thursday of the 26th Week in Ordinary Time, Year I
Memorial of St. Mother Theodore Guerin
October 3, 2013
Neh 8:1-12, Ps 19, Lk 10:1-12

Consecrated Women and the Word of God in the Year of Faith toward the New Evangelization

- Throughout the last two weeks, we have been focusing in the first reading on the rebuilding of the Temple of Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the City of Jerusalem, and the rebuilding on God's people after the exile. That rebuilding is a prophetic *ot* (*an action that is itself a prophecy*) of the rebuilding of Christ, the True Temple, the building and rebuilding of our lives on Christ and the building and rebuilding of the Church as a whole called to be a Temple of God. The theme of the rebuilding of the temple is an important link to our Day of Recollection today on Women Religious in the Year of Faith toward a New Evangelization. The Church, like the Jews, needs to grow in faith and live by faith, because it was precisely the lack of living by faith that led to the exile. Likewise, the rebuilding of the Church will come through a new evangelization. And both faith and evangelization involve the Word of God, which is the subject of both of the readings today. The first reading from the Book of Nehemiah focuses on what we could call receiving and rejoicing in the Word of God with faith. The Gospel ponders how all of us are called to en flesh and to share that word of God with others, how we're called to continue in the new evangelization what was begun in the first evangelization.
- Today in the Book of Nehemiah we see Scripture's ideal presentation of what *Lectio Divina*, the prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture, is supposed to be. Many of us are familiar with the particularly Benedictine approach to *Lectio Divina*, which Pope Benedict described in his 2010 Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church (*Verbum Domini*). It involves *lectio* (reading to determine the meaning of the passage), *meditatio* (asking what it's saying to me), *oratio* (what we say back to God in prayer crying out for his help to live the word, *contemplatio* (imaging ourselves living together with this word, becoming "one-temple" with it), and *actio* (putting the word into practice). In the first reading today, however, we see Scripture's presentation of *Lectio Divina*, and it involves — as Cardinal Giancarlo Ravasi preached in the 17th and last of his meditations in the Lenten Retreat to Pope Benedict and the members of the Vatican Curia right before Pope Benedict retired this February — seven "stars," or practices that we shall all try to emulate as we respond to God's word. Ezra the Priest led the post-exilic Israelites in a day of recollection from dawn to midday on the then recently rediscovered scrolls of the Torah.
- The first aspect was *reading*. Ezra and the scribes read plainly from God's word in distinct passages, like points of meditation. The word in Hebrew means to "proclaim" since reading Sacred Scripture was always done aloud. It also means "translate," because many of the post-exilic Jews were rusty in Hebrew. It points to the connection between reading and proclaiming, and reading and making it intelligible to the minds and lives of those hearing.
- The second aspect was *interpreting*, or explaining the word of God. As the scribes read, they helped the people to grasp some of the applications. There are often many meanings to God's word. The Catechism describes three different types of spiritual meanings, one linked to Jesus, another to ourselves and our response in faith, and a third to heaven and to our vocation to be saints. When we ponder and proclaim the word of God, this aspect of explaining it is very important if we're ever going to reach the third stage.
- The third stage was *understanding* the Word of God. This is far more than an intellectual grasp of the material, but the Hebrew word means that there's a knowledge at the level of one's entire personality and that it impacts us at the level of our entire being. The Latin word for wisdom, *sapientia*, comes from the Latin word to taste. When we understand the Word of God, we taste it, and it delights us, although, as Ezechiel himself experienced when God had him eat the scroll of the Word of God, sometimes it can seem bitter because it leads to the crucifixion of our old way of being.
- Those three stages or stars are call basically the first movement of the Word of God as we seek to grasp at

the level of our being what God is saying to us. The next four stages or stars involve our response to it.

- The fourth stage is *listening* to the Word of God. "All the people listened attentively to the book of the law," Nehemiah tells us. The Jewish people are basically formed out of the command to listen. The famous Schema they pray each day reminds them of Moses' words, "*Hear*, O Israel, that the Lord your God is God alone." To listen means something different than merely absorbing the Word through our ears, kind of like an auditory reading. Rather, in Hebrew there's no distinction between *hearing* and *obeying*. It's the same word. To listen to the Word of God is to listen to it as a word to be done, as an imperative once understood. In Latin, we keep the connection between hearing (*audire*) and obeying (*ob-audire*), which means a listening so attentive we're hanging on every word. St. James calls us not to be merely idle listeners but "doers" of the Word. We're called to say like Mary, who was praised by Jesus for hearing the Word of God and doing it, "Let it be done to me according to your Word." To be a member of Jesus' family, he said elsewhere, we must do the will of the Father in heaven. This is the type of attentive listening to the Word that is being described here.
- The fifth stage is to *convert*. "Do not be sad, and do not weep," the people are told, because they were all weeping as they heard the words of the law. St. James says the Word of God is like a mirror, and when they looked at the Mirror of God's word, they saw who they were supposed to be and who they in fact were and it brought them to tears. They bowed down and prostrated themselves before the Lord, their faces to the ground. Likewise, the Word of God is meant to bring us to conversion, to change our ways, so that we may conform ourselves to what God is telling us through his Word.
- The sixth stage is to *respond to the word of God with acts of charity*. The text tells us that "all the people raised their hands high, saying 'Amen. Amen'" and immediately began to allot portions of food and drink to those who didn't have any "because they understood the words that had been expounded to them." The real impact of the Word of God is that it's supposed to help us to love others as God has loved us. It's a word of love. Hearing the word of God must change life. There's an existential commitment that God seeks when he speaks. Cardinal Ravasi in the retreat he preached in February said in Italian, "Not basta il culto senza la vita. Non basta la liturgia senza la giustizia. Non basta la preghiera senza l'impegno esistenziale." Our worship is supposed to change our life, the liturgy is supposed to inspire us to justice, prayer is supposed to lead to the fruit of a total commitment of our life. That's what we see happened with the Jews who "understood" the words of the Lord. That's what is supposed to occur for us.
- The seventh and last stage is to *celebrate*. There was a great feast. "Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks," they were told, "for today is holy to our Lord. Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength!" The Word of God is meant to fill us with joy and lead us to celebrate that joy with others, sharing our joy, our food, our drink, our lives with others. Rejoicing is supposed to be our great strength as believers and that joy flows from the total transformation the Word of God does in us. "The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart," as we prayed in the Responsorial Psalm! There's obviously a Eucharistic dimension to this feast, when, after having heard the Word of God, we eat the most unbelievable food ever and drink the choicest liquid. And that feast is supposed to lead to the *agape*, which is the overflowing, loving, joyful communion that comes from the liturgical celebration.
- And so we see all seven stages, to read, explain, understand, listen and obey, convert, act with charity and celebrate. That's the way we receive the Word of God with faith!
- But that's only part of the Word God gives us today in this, our own recollection. In the Gospel, Jesus sent out the 72 to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is at hand. He didn't send out merely the 12 apostles. He sent out 60 others with them, probably all who were willing to go. He asked them to pray to God the Harvest Master to send out laborers for his harvest, not knowing that they were all — and we all — are meant to be an answer to that prayer. We're all called to spread the Gospel we ourselves have enfolded. In fact, once we have really understood the great news of salvation, how can we not share it? We all say, with St. Paul, "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!"
- Jesus described many elements we would confront in our labor of harvesting that are key for us to grasp for the new evangelization.
- First, he sends us out as *lambs among wolves*. It's not easy work. Some will oppose us, even ferociously, and we have to be ready for it. At the end of the passage, Jesus describes that when we experience rejection, we should wipe the dust of the town off our feet. This is not only a middle eastern way of testifying against

them, but it's also a very important counsel lest we move on to the next town taking the baggage (the dust) of previous failures, hurts, and wounds.

- Second, he packages the message he sends us out to proclaim in a real trust in his Providence. He tells us to carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals. If we're going to be repeating Jesus' words that we shouldn't worry about what we are to eat and drink, what we are to wear or where we are to sleep because God loves us more than the sparrows and the lilies and will take care of us, we need to be living by those principles. We cannot effectively proclaim the Gospel to the poor in a Mercedes. We need to trust in God. That's why the evangelical counsel of poverty is so important in the midst of a world that puts its trust not in God but in IRAs and other forms of mammon. We need to preach our trust in God and show to all how he really does take care of us. Likewise, Jesus sends them out two-by-two — even though they could have covered twice as much ground if they went out individually — so that they would be able to proclaim the call to communion and the necessity to forgive our neighbor.
- Third, Jesus wanted them to prioritize this mission. "Greet no one along the way" was not a command to be rude to people, but a message not to be distracted. Many times those sent out to proclaim the Gospel are drawn from their completing their task not by sinful attractions but by good ones. Many of us don't finish our duties because someone else interrupts us with mostly non-urgent items. Jesus wants other things not to get in the way of the urgency of proclaiming his message and taking in the harvest that's already ripe.
- Fourth, he wants us to bring peace specifically to families. He sends us not to the city squares but to households to bring his peace. The proclamation of the Gospel advances one family at a time.
- Fifth, he never wants us looking for a better deal. He tells us to stay where we are, eating and drinking what's set before us, rather than seeking a better house or better food. This is a perennial threat. A few weeks ago Pope Francis spoke to new bishops in Rome for a short course. He told them not to be seeking bigger, better, richer dioceses. That's just as unfaithful as a husband who married a good, simple woman, who would always be looking for a more prestigious bride. Yet this is often what happens for those who proclaim the Gospel. Jesus warns us of this temptation, to bloom where we're planted, rather than to seek a greener garden elsewhere.
- Sixth, Jesus stresses the connection between preaching and healing. He sent them out to preach and to heal, because it's going to be hard for people to hear the word of God if they are so full of wounds. This is what Pope Francis has been saying to the entire Church, that we have to be conscious of the wounds people have and dress and address them, because those are often the great thorns that will prevent the growth of the seed of the Word of God. The Word of God itself brings healing, and we're supposed to be walking advertisements of the type of healing it brings when one lives a life in union with the Divine Physician.
- The seventh and last counsel Jesus gives is to en flesh the Word. "The kingdom of God is at hand." He doesn't have them say that the kingdom is on its way, or that they'll find the kingdom in a small house in Capernaum. Instead they were to announce that the kingdom had arrived, because the King was alive. The kingdom of God is coextensive where Christ the King reigns. To announce the kingdom means that God is alive, that he is here with us, that he is the most real reality of all, and to invite people in to that royal relationship. We are not sent out merely as heralds of a kingdom to which we don't belong, but as princes and princesses, members of the royal family, reminding others of their own nobility and calling them to receive and live in accordance with that (spiritual re-)birth right.
- Today the Lord Jesus is calling us to read this truth, to interpret it, understand it, to obey it, to convert to it, to act on it and to celebrate it with him in his kingdom. And the greatest celebration in his kingdom here among us on earth happens right here, as we prepare to feast on the richest food and the sweetest drink of all.

The readings for the Mass were:

Reading 1 [NEH 8:1-4A, 5-6, 7B-12](#)

The whole people gathered as one in the open space before the Water Gate, and they called upon Ezra the scribe to bring forth the book of the law of Moses which the LORD prescribed for Israel.

On the first day of the seventh month, therefore,
Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly,
which consisted of men, women,
and those children old enough to understand.
Standing at one end of the open place that was before the Water Gate,
he read out of the book from daybreak until midday,
in the presence of the men, the women,
and those children old enough to understand;
and all the people listened attentively to the book of the law.
Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform
that had been made for the occasion.
He opened the scroll
so that all the people might see it
(for he was standing higher up than any of the people);
and, as he opened it, all the people rose.
Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God,
and all the people, their hands raised high, answered,
“Amen, amen!”
Then they bowed down and prostrated themselves before the LORD,
their faces to the ground.
As the people remained in their places,
Ezra read plainly from the book of the law of God,
interpreting it so that all could understand what was read.
Then Nehemiah, that is, His Excellency, and Ezra the priest-scribe
and the Levites who were instructing the people
said to all the people:
“Today is holy to the LORD your God.
Do not be sad, and do not weep”—
for all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law.
He said further: “Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks,
and allot portions to those who had nothing prepared;
for today is holy to our LORD.
Do not be saddened this day,
for rejoicing in the LORD must be your strength!”
And the Levites quieted all the people, saying,
“Hush, for today is holy, and you must not be saddened.”
Then all the people went to eat and drink,
to distribute portions, and to celebrate with great joy,
for they understood the words that had been expounded to them.

Responsorial Psalm [PS 19:8, 9, 10, 11](#)

R. (9ab) The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul;

The decree of the LORD is trustworthy,
giving wisdom to the simple.

R. The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

The precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;

The command of the LORD is clear,
enlightening the eye;

R. The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

The fear of the LORD is pure,

enduring forever;

The ordinances of the LORD are true,
all of them just.

R. The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

They are more precious than gold,
than a heap of purest gold;
Sweeter also than syrup
or honey from the comb.

R. The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

Gospel [LK 10:1-12](#)

Jesus appointed seventy-two other disciples
whom he sent ahead of him in pairs
to every town and place he intended to visit.

He said to them,

“The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few;
so ask the master of the harvest
to send out laborers for his harvest.

Go on your way;

behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves.

Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals;
and greet no one along the way.

Into whatever house you enter, first say,

‘Peace to this household.’

If a peaceful person lives there,

your peace will rest on him;

but if not, it will return to you.

Stay in the same house and eat and drink what is offered to you,
for the laborer deserves his payment.

Do not move about from one house to another.

Whatever town you enter and they welcome you,
eat what is set before you,

cure the sick in it and say to them,

‘The Kingdom of God is at hand for you.’

Whatever town you enter and they do not receive you,
go out into the streets and say,

‘The dust of your town that clings to our feet,

even that we shake off against you.’

Yet know this: the Kingdom of God is at hand.

I tell you,

it will be more tolerable for Sodom on that day than for that town.”