

“Set Free at the Source of Our Demise”

Sermon for Solemn Mass, Sacra Liturgia Conference
Votive Mass of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Eternal High Priest
July 7, 2016, Brompton Oratory, London

Introduction

In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

In the long pontificate of Saint John Paul II it would be difficult to pick one moment to define as the most moving of all, but certainly in the running would have to be his visit to his would-be assassin, Ali Ağca, in prison, and forgiving him for attempting to take his life. Saint John Paul goes back to the point of the pain, the origin of this attempted assassination, to heal the pain at its root, to forgive, for forgiveness brings healing.

Healing at the Source

As I reflect on this, it is not unlike those who undergo therapy for some sort of trauma they suffered early in life. They, too, have to go back, so to speak – go back to the source of the pain, to address it right there, confront it and address it, in order to find healing and freedom. This is a reality of our human nature; if we are to find healing, we must go back to the source of where it all started – not just psychological healing, though, but spiritual as well. Not just personal spiritual suffering, but the spiritual demise of our whole human race.

And so in this Votive Mass of our Lord Jesus Christ the Eternal High Priest, we pray in the preface to God the Father, “who didst establish the salvation of mankind on the tree of the cross. That, whence death came, that also light might rise again. And that he who overcame by the tree, by the tree also might be overcome,” a reference to the deception of our first parents. They were deceived from a tree, which was placed in a garden.

That is how the evil one overcame and seduced us, and took us away from the happiness for which God created us. God undoes the damage by going back to where it all started, the tree of the cross. The tree of the cross undoes the damage of the tree in the Garden of Eden. Our Lord dies on that cross, and he is buried in a garden outside of the city. As our first parents were deceived in a garden and cast out, out of paradise, our Lord is buried outside of Jerusalem, a symbol of paradise.

Healing in and of the Flesh

It was by means of our flesh that the devil corrupted us, capitalizing on our flesh. And so our flesh will corrupt after death. Therefore, the eternal Son of God takes on a body, he takes on our human flesh, so that he may offer to his Father a perfect priestly sacrifice; so that in our flesh, which was the source of our demise, he might redeem our flesh, bestowing on the redeemed a glorified eternal body, which will not corrupt but will allow the elect to behold God face-to-face for all eternity.

Our Lord makes this offering in his body which he assumed from our nature, an eternal offering. He continues to offer himself for us in our own space and time, through the offering of his Body and Blood in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, all the way until the consummation of all history. He broke the bread, leaving us this memorial just as his body would be broken for us. He offered his blood under the appearance of wine, just as he would pour out his blood for us on the cross, and does so for us at every Mass.

It corresponds to us, then, in our flesh, to allow him to touch us at the source of our separation from him that he might forgive, heal, and free us. He emptied himself for us in order to assume a body, and in that body to offer the perfect sacrifice for our salvation; so we, too, must empty ourselves of ourselves so that he might fill us with himself. We must then pursue the path of humility, allowing the Lord to bring us low, through our acts of penance and fasting, through our prayer, through our works of charity.

Conclusion

During these days that we are together God has abundantly blessed us with experiences of prayer and fellowship that lift our souls to Him as we behold a glimpse of His beauty. Through this He has increased in us our love of Him, and our desire for Him. He touches us at the depths of our being; let us then allow Him to heal us there so that we may be filled with His light and beauty, that the whole world may know this forgiveness and healing, and enjoy the peace and freedom that only He can give.

In the name of the Father and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit.