

Fr. Alphonso Galvez's Homily Given at St. Norbert on Sunday, November 29, 2009

Contributed by Fr. Jared Hood
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My dear brethren in Our Lord Jesus Christ:

Before anything else, I want to express my deepest joy and my most heartfelt gratitude because of the good welcome you have given to me and to my Priests among yourselves. I come from Europe. My country, as the rest of Europe, is a country that has totally renounced the Faith in Christ. It is a country which, if you wear the priestly garment, the people insult you in the street. Here, on the contrary...

in this blessed town, in this country, which I have loved so much since I was a child, we have found a very kind, warm, and affectionate welcome. That is why I am very proud today to celebrate this holy Mass in this beautiful church built upon very strong walls, which are an expression of a robust and strong faith. Those who were your forefathers built this beautiful church; their faith was strong and profound; they lived their Catholic Faith in their soul and in their heart. And that deep faith has been entrusted to you, who are living it nowadays. Therefore, I would like to exhort you to keep those fundamental principles of the Catholic Faith which you have received from the first comers to this country and that you live with authenticity and faithfulness, that you should intensify your living those principles and live them more authentically; taking into account that today's world is a world that has practically renounced God, and that the Church is going through the deepest crisis in all her history.

As I told you before: Europe has renounced completely her faith. In this sense, Europe is a desert of Faith: there are no Priests; the Sacraments are not practiced; people don't go to the Holy Mass; and the Shepherds seem to have forgotten to fulfill their obligations and their duties as Shepherds. That is why it is so important that you live strongly the principles of our Catholic Faith. I would venture to stress some of them; for instance, the sublime Sacrament of Confession. It is the Sacrament through which God reconciles us to Himself; He forgives our sins, and He brings back joy and peace to our heart.

My dearly beloved in our Lord, in my long Priestly life I have been in many countries. When I was a missionary, I preached the gospel in the heights of the Andes Mountains in Ecuador. Let me open my heart to you: I wish you had known how those poor, unfortunate, and wretched Indians loved Jesus Christ. They called Christ "Daddy God" ("taitito diosito" in their Quechua language) ; and they called me "Dad" ("taita" in Quechua). They practiced their Sacraments with an unbreakable faith.

I was in charge of the parish which was located 15,000 feet high on the Andes Mountains, and the Indians came to my humble church from everywhere. It was a big but very poor church, built with wood. They came barefoot; sometimes they stayed in line for two or more days and nights to be able to go to confession; so much they loved this Sacrament of Confession! Sometimes I had to be sitting in the confessional place for twenty hours in a row. Some kind people brought coffee to the confessional so that I would not fall asleep; consequently, my nerves were about to explode. After eighteen or twenty hours hearing confessions, dressed in my cassock, I rested a little bit on a bed, a couple of hours; and afterwards I went back to the long lines at the confessional. Those poor people who were waiting several days to go to confession brought along with themselves a little handkerchief in which they kept their food, a handful of grains of corn soaked in water; and that was their food for two days. I wish you had seen their great sincerity, devotion, and love for Jesus Christ with which they went to confession. You should have seen the peace of their hearts.

You might ask yourself, why is Father Alfonso telling us this? I am telling you this because in our civilized countries, where we have all the means at our disposal, sometimes we do not appreciate this marvelous, this wonderful and outstanding Sacrament, instituted by Christ to bring peace to our soul and joy to our heart, so that we feel again to be real children of God.

I wish I could tell you about the devotion of the Indians to this Sacrament which today is so despised: the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Sometimes the Indians called me to assist a sick person who lived very high in the mountains, so that the sick person could receive the Eucharist. Sometimes this visiting the sick took me three, four, even five hours riding the horse climbing up the mountains, and the same amount of hours on my way back to my rectory. And the wonderful thing, something which I had never seen in my own land, in Spain: when there were a few kilometers still left to reach the small hut of the sick Indian, a great number of women came to meet me with their baskets filled with petals of roses, and, barefooted as they were, they were running ahead of my horse, scattering those petals all over the places Our Lord had to go through. I, filled of compassion for these women, kept trying to stay the horse so that it wouldn't run too fast. Today, when I see with my own eyes that people in my homeland receive Communion with a lack of fervor, with total lack of consideration for Jesus Christ present in that Sacrament; today, when nobody kneels down to receive the Sacrament; today, when people don't care about putting themselves first at peace with God in order to receive the Sacrament as

Jesus deserves to be received - for in my homeland nobody goes to confession; they receive the Body of Christ as if they were receiving any unimportant thing.

That is why I exhort you, as I told you before, to live deeply the principles of your faith that you have inherited and received from God. And your living those principles will imply a heroic attitude. You well know, as I told you before, that we are living in difficult times; that the Church is going through a terrible crisis; that many Christians are confused and disoriented. Sometimes we even have to suffer Shepherds who do not fulfill their duties. About this, I would like to tell you something from the bottom of my heart: Be always faithful to the hierarchy of the Church. Remember that the Church is always where Peter is, and Peter is the Pope. Where Peter is, there the Church is too. The fact that we have to put up with corrupted Shepherds who do not fulfill their duties is part of the demands of our Faith. Do not forget, my dear brethren, that we must share the sufferings, the passion, and the death of Jesus Christ. And this is one of the trials which our Faith must undergo; but because we are faithful to the Church and members of the flock of Christ, we have not received an order from Christ to establish a new church or a new hierarchy. If the case were that the Shepherd is not very convincing or his behaviour is doubtful, as I have told you before, that is part of the demands of our Faith and part of the trial in which we must share the sufferings, passion, and death of our Lord. But the Church will prevail until the end of time.

We have the principles and our wonderful Faith. And, along and beyond the means of holiness, we also have Him from Whom all grace flows, all truth and all holiness comes: Our Lord Jesus Christ. We are all Christians, but we have seldom thought seriously about the fact that God became one of us, a man. We all know that God is a pure Spirit; but we have never seen a pure spirit; we cannot even imagine what a pure spirit is. The Jews of the Old Testament, who had toward God more fear than love, they used to say, "Let God not speak to us, lest we see His face we should die; better for us to have Moses speak to us."

To love God, we need to perceive Him, because nobody falls in love with someone he has not seen, someone unknown. His beauty and goodness that attracts us will seduce our hearts. That is why God became man in Jesus Christ; and Jesus Christ, as Saint John says in his first letter: we can perceive him, and we can touch him - and we can feel him and we can hug him and we can eat him in the Eucharist; and we can talk to him from person to person, and He will answer us in the same way and with the same intimacy. You may say that such a thing could happen only through faith, and it is true. But the Holy Spirit, if we allow Him to guide us, is engraving in our hearts the image of Jesus Christ and is reminding us of Jesus' words and Jesus' teachings. The Holy Spirit makes us understand the meaning and significance of Jesus' words. In this way, which is incomprehensible to us, we are getting to know Jesus better. He doesn't want to be just our Lord, but also our friend -remember his words: I will no longer call you servants, but friends-; He who loved us to the very end, as Saint John says, Jesus, having loved his own according to the world, He loved them to the very end. This man, this true man, gave meaning to our existence and to our life. He delivered us from fear of death; He freed us from slavery to sin; He taught us to be free and the way to true freedom. According to Him the only thing that enslaves us is sin; and the very thing that leads us to freedom is truth; and Truth is Christ himself, as Christ Himself said. Let us not forget it: political freedoms, the freedoms that democracy provides for us in this blessed country which is a pioneer in the political system, these freedoms are but a consequence of true freedom, the very one that Christ our Lord gave us.

Death is punishment for sin; it is something we are all afraid of. But we share in His own death; we share in His own existence; and since then, because the death of Jesus Christ is beautiful in the eyes of God, also our death, united to His, is beautiful and glorious. As the Bible says, "Beautiful in the eyes of God is the death of His holy ones."

You might tell me: "But we have never seen Christ." And yet, because you live on faith, you share in the glory of the words which Jesus addressed to one of His disciples. Do you remember Saint Thomas, the incredulous disciple who did not believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ unless he put his fingers in Jesus' wounds? Then Jesus appeared again to the apostles for the second time, and this time Thomas was present with them. Then Thomas fell to his knees and said: My Lord and my God. Then Jesus told Thomas these words in which you share, Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen me and yet have believed. Among those blessed ones are you, we all are; we perceive Jesus through Faith. But for us that perception is the most wonderful and the most beautiful of all other realities.

As I told you at the very beginning, my dear brethren, many years ago, this country was colonized by good people from another continent. But that continent, from which your forefathers came, nowadays is a barren desert in regards to the Faith. You cannot have any idea how much I suffer when I see to what a terrible extent my homeland has become de-Christianized; and how consoling it is to me to find here the warm welcoming you have given us.

I have found here married couples who believe in the integrity of and the fidelity in marriage until death. I have found parents who believe that children are, first, a blessing from God; second, an expression of their own trust in the principles of the Gospel and in the providence of God; and thirdly, an expression of the trust that Providence Itself has in them, to whom It has entrusted so many children. I have also found in this country generous and courageous young men and women who have not been corrupted and who live their purity with integrity and joy. This is why I am going to tell you something very important, something which you may not think about in earnest: this blessed country - I am not American by birth, but I am in my heart - was colonized many years ago. But, since the rest of the Western world is a

total desolation that has totally renounced the Catholic Faith, would it not be now the very moment for the roles to be reversed? Wouldn't it be now the moment in which this country is called to be the cradle from which courageous, filled-with-a-fiery-faith men and women come out, willing to evangelize those countries which have lost their faith in God?

Given the situation of today's world, we don't know if we are in the beginning of the last moments of the history of this world. Only God knows that. But if the history of the world is going to continue, then this is the moment in which I make my own that beloved and well-known expression: God save America. I totally agree with that marvelous expression. But is not now the moment for America to save the world? Or that God saves the world using America as an instrument? When I am in my country - I am speaking from the bottom of my heart -, I am filled with sadness when I witness some of your politicians saying that this great country has to close in on itself, to ignore the problems of the rest of the world, and to think only of its survival. I think that these politicians are betraying what God expects from this great country.

The moment is indeed here for your children and the children of your children to go generously all over the world to preach Jesus Christ; this wonderful Jesus Christ who has given meaning to our life, as I told you before, who has turned values upside down so as to put into first place the true values. How could we ever have thought, without this inspiration, that life has meaning only when it is given up: he who loses his own life for my sake will find it. How could we know this without this man, this God, telling it to us? How could we find out that the supreme value of this world and the other is love and the surrendering of our life for the others? How could we have ever imagined that only Jesus is the one who gives us true joy; that true joy that will be consummated in our true Homeland, but a joy that already is somehow a reality in this life? How could one forget those wonderful words of Saint Paul, the Apostle, when he said: None of us lives for himself, and none of us dies for himself. If we live, we live for the Lord; if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore, whether we live or we die, we belong to our Lord.

One final thing: I am going back to Spain with the assurance, based on your affection and your trust, that you will pray for all of us, especially for me. Ours are difficult times; times of crisis for the Church and difficult times for those who want to be true disciples of Christ and true Priests of Christ. But war times are also times of victory. And our sufferings, our failures, and the difficulties we have to face, are the guarantee that the grace of God will always be with us, and that we will triumph, and we will be the witnesses of Jesus Christ, and the Church will pull through. Sometimes we will suffer, and we will fail; and quite often we will be very tired because of the demands of living our Faith, the opposition, our own failures and sufferings. But as that great general said: Battles are only won by tired soldiers.

May God bless you all.