

Cistercian Abbey Our Lady of Dallas

July 12, 2015

Fr. Justin McNamara

15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Am 7:12-15, Eph 1:3-14, Mk 6:7-13

When a young man seeks to enter a monastery, it often happens that he is asked to select three names of saints who particularly speak to him through their lives and teachings. It's to symbolize a radical change of path and identity. Among my own choices, as I was seriously considering them, was Blessed Columba Marmion. However, sheer pragmatism led me to discard him as a patron; I just couldn't bring myself to the reality that I would forever after be called 'Fr. Columba,' a name which indeed means 'dove' but sounds way too heavy to me. Then again, one of my final options was Anselm! Nevertheless, what should be obvious here is that the life of the saint and what he has to say to us is meant to remain central. What does he say about Christ and the life demanded of his followers? Blessed Marmion's entire life and writings rarely ever diverged from this center. In fact, he is often known as the 'Doctor of the Divine Adoption', and for good reason.

The second reading today comes from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians and contains just such an exposition on the whole Divine Plan of adoption. St. Paul places before us the revelation of God's gracious work for salvation. It's a plan that we all know in its bare outline: From all eternity the Father loves His Son and the Son loves the Father, both giving themselves to one another in the Holy Spirit. This selfless Love, then, finds new expression in creation; there's the merciful plan to restore man after original sin; the sending of the Son in Jesus Christ; His life, ministry, passion and resurrection; the founding of the Church; the rebirth and entrance into divine life through baptism; and the design for all souls to rest at last in the heavenly kingdom of the Father. As marvelous as it all sounds to us, as profound as the promise is, we Christians, we followers of Christ, we often do not give it the centrality and seriousness that it proposes to be.

It's precisely *this* magnificent plan that nourished Blessed Columba Marmion throughout his life, never wavering from its offer and its demands. He saw with remarkable clarity what this offer means for each one of us. It's nothing less than participation in the divine life of the Trinity, and the divine life is nothing less than sharing in the *holiness* of God. Our entry into this kind of existence, this holiness, began

with our baptism *in Christ*. It was administered, to be sure, in the one Name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; but the life of God we know and experience, and have received from the Father is all *in Christ*. This *steadfast* faith in the heart and soul of Blessed Marmion is surely what led him to the holiness of life which God granted him.

Now it's true that the saints, recognized and proclaimed by the Church, are given extraordinary graces, particularly so as to bolster our own faith. But what was true for Blessed Marmion is not *in the least* less true for us. The call and invitation to become a child of God through baptism *and then* to live a life which is 'holy and blameless in his sight' is the only real work which the Father seeks to accomplish in us. Let's remember that his goal for us is Heaven not Purgatory. It seems so obvious, but it's a mindset we can quickly fall into. Though that heavenly reality is veiled to us, it's still accessible to us now in what, Blessed Marmion calls, *pure* faith. But the impressions this world make on us always seem stronger, more real than where we are ultimately heading. We then get bogged down and tangled in the weeds of the world. We lose our focus. What Christ asks of us—and Blessed Marmion encourages—is to serve Him with a faith so deep, as though 'we gazed upon Him in vision'.

What I mean to be driving at here is a question of identity. Who or what is dearest to us? Do we see ourselves essentially as teachers, managers, moms, dads, students, brothers, sisters, doctors or...even actors? There's a famous story told about Archbishop Fulton Sheen and the Shakespearean actor Richard Burton, who were invited to a party and, on account of their skills as public speakers, were requested to recite Psalm 23. Burton went first and delivered it movingly with all the skill and drama of an actor. However, Fulton Sheen recited it with great depth, calm and trust, moving the audience to silence. The host, after hearing the two renditions, proclaimed, 'the actor knew the psalm but the preacher knows the Shepherd.' You see, it's the *union* with Christ that allows us to grow, to remain conscious of *who we really* are, and then to offer an authentic witness to those around us.

Perhaps in these summer months many of us can avail ourselves of any extra time to dedicate ourselves precisely to more prayer, to building up this consciousness of our status as adopted children of God. We can challenge ourselves to prepare more intentionally for mass; to examine our consciences and seek to come closer to Christ through the sacrament of healing and reconciliation. In other words, who do people say that we are? Does our identity lie elsewhere than *in Christ*? Do we catch ourselves merely fulfilling duties, and content with the safety net of Purgatory? Or do we sincerely long to live for Christ alone and make changes accordingly?

This vision, then, that St. Paul and Blessed Marmion so firmly grasped and handed down to us is the sine qua non of the Christian's life. It's what's needed to carry out what Jesus asks of His disciples today in the Gospel. When a Christian is absolutely filled with the grace and life of Christ and lives his or her life with a *radical* act of faith, repentance can be authentically preached, demons can be driven out and the sick can be cured. This witness of faith-filled Christians is sorely needed in today's world, which increasingly is becoming more dizzying and disorienting.

You know one of the hallmarks of Blessed Marmion's teachings is its admirable simplicity: God loves us, He shares His Life with us now, and wishes us to cling to Him in faith in this world so as to be with Him forever in Heaven. This is a message, I believe, that not only we can take with us, but one that the world needs also to embrace. The most important task we have here on earth is really quite simple: to cling to Christ and then to see Him in Heaven. May a line from Psalm 91 guide us to continue this mission: "Since he clings to me in love, I will free him."