

HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
MASS OF THANKSGIVING FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF
BLESSED MARIE-EUGENE DE L'ENFANT-JESUS
NATIONAL SHRINE OF ST. JOHN PAUL II, WASHINGTON, DC
SATURDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT, APRIL 1, 2017

I am very pleased to be with you today as we give thanks to God for Blessed Marie-Eugene of the Infant Jesus, who was beatified on November 19, 2016. March 27th marked the 50th anniversary of his death, or really, his *dies natalis*. I wish to thank Anne-Elisabeth Giuliani for her kind invitation and the Knights of Columbus for making this Shrine available. I welcome members of the Institut Notre-Dame de Vie, the members of the Washington Province of the Discalced Carmelites, especially Father Jude Peters, the Provincial, and Father Robert Panke, Rector of the John Paul II. As the Apostolic Nuncio, the personal representative of the Holy Father in the United States, I express to you the spiritual closeness of the Holy Father as we remember this new blessed of the Church!

Today, I would like to provide some thoughts as to why Blessed Marie-Eugene is an important figure for us during the twenty-first century and during the Pontificate of Pope Francis. First, he was a man of prayer, who emphasized the need for an authentic encounter with God, especially in silence. Second, he was a man who was a friend of the Holy Spirit and did not hesitate to offer prophetic witness in the Church. Third, he was a man, who was not in any way self-referential, but rather went out of himself, relying on the power of God's Mercy.

Pope Benedict XVI, in the opening paragraph of his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* noted that "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but of an encounter with an Event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."

Blessed Eugene, as a man of prayer, was one who knew this; he had, like all of us, a deep thirst for God, writing: "The thirst for God is not at all a privilege of culture. God fortunately enkindles it in many souls and it suffices to have received it to grasp the language of the masters who have traced the way along the steep paths that lead to the source of living water."

Yes, the encounter is an initiative of God, a gift which is often received in silence. Our world today is filled with noise – the shouts of unrest, constant busyness and engagement through the use of the new media and technologies, television, radio, etc. But where is the silence? Where is there "space" to hear the voice of God, who spoke to the prophet Elijah in a whisper? This same God spoke through the Archangel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin, asking her to be the Mother of the Messiah. Mary encountered the angel, reflected on the greeting, inquired about how this was to happen, and placing her trust in God, she surrendered – *Be it done unto me according to your word!*

She assumed the responsibility of the mission God entrusted to her. If we are to carry out our mission in the world, we need to listen for the voice of God to discover our mission and to prepare ourselves. In *I Want to See God*, Blessed Marie-Eugene wrote:

Any task at all that requires a serious application of our faculties, presupposes the recollection and silence that render it possible. The scientist needs silence to prepare his experiments. The philosopher recollects himself in solitude to put order into his thoughts and penetrate into them. The silence that the thinker is avid for, that his intellectual energies may not be disturbed in their reflections, is still more necessary for the spiritual person, that the whole soul may be applied to the search of its divine object.

Blessed Marie-Eugene proposes to us once more the value of silence and authentic encounter with God to be fit for mission. In silence, we encounter the Holy Spirit of God, who overshadowed Mary and who propelled her to visit Elizabeth. The Holy Spirit helps us find our prophetic voice in a world that forgets about God. Blessed Marie-Eugene founded the Institute, knowing well the urgency of the mission:

In a world that has lost a sense of God, that is perhaps losing this sense more and more, the Institute has its place, it has its mission all the more urgent because atheism is taking more victims: atheism does not make us flee; on the contrary, it calls us, because it calls for a testimony, the testimony that affirms the existence of God and of His rights.

Mary knew this urgency. She could not keep this Good News to herself; she hastened to give witness. She is not simply a disciple, but she is also a missionary disciple! She gives us the example of a Church going forth. But, Mary arrived at her decision to say Yes to God and to visit Elizabeth, by taking her time and thinking things through. Commenting on this passage, Pope Francis reminds us:

“It is difficult in life to take decisions. We often tend to put them off, to let others decide instead. We frequently prefer to let ourselves be dragged along by events, to follow the current fashion; at times, we know what we ought to do but do not have the courage to do it, or it seems too difficult because it means swimming against the tide. In the Annunciation, in the Visitation ... Mary goes against the tide; she listens to God, she reflects and seeks to understand reality and decides to entrust herself totally to God. Although she is with child, she decides to visit her elderly relative and she decides to entrust herself to her Son with insistence so as to preserve the joy of the wedding feast.” (Address of the Holy Father, 31 May 2013)

Mary was sustained in her mission by the Spirit of God. Blessed Marie-Eugene calls us to surrender to this Spirit:

The Spirit is alive. He is the soul of my soul. He is the Master. He builds the Church and ordained everything. I abandon myself to him in active readiness, with eyes closed, without trying to see into the future. I use all of my strength for the accomplishment of the present under his light and his will.

Do we surrender to the Spirit of God, allowing ourselves to move beyond our old way of seeing and doing things? Do we trust that the Spirit is alive in the Church even now? Just four years before his death, Blessed Marie-Eugene said, “The Institute is oriented toward this new Pentecost – the Pentecost of each day, continuous! The Institute was made to carry out this Pentecost within the Church.”

Pope Francis speaks of renewal and reform in the Church. This is a gift of the Spirit, whose first work is conversion. This was the message of all the great prophets – repentance and return to the Lord! Yet, God does not bring about this renewal without our cooperation. As our Blessed points out:

In our personal sanctification, in the building of the Mystical Body of Christ, that is to say, of his work of Mercy on Earth, God has imposed on himself this law – the requirement of acting with the collaboration of our freedom. Even for the incarnation, he did not want to act without the consent of human freedom, without the consent of the Virgin Mary.

Yes, the works of the Church are works of Mercy. The men and women of our day need to know the tenderness of God. This is our task – to go out as missionary disciples in the power of the Spirit. While Blessed Marie-Eugene may have preferred the silence of the Carmel, he went in the Spirit, to Vietnam and the Philippines, because he knew the power of the Gospel.

What a difference the Gospel of Jesus Christ makes for our world! But it is the Gospel of **Jesus**, whom we must encounter! He is the One whom Mary brought to Elizabeth! He is the One for whom John the Baptist leapt for joy in his mother's womb!

It is always God's power and the power of the Spirit at work in us that makes all things possible. Our experience of the mercy that comes to us in Christ, as it came to Saint Paul, equips us for mission. St. Paul writes: *God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ – by grace you have been saved.*" (Eph 2: 4-5) It is this that allowed Blessed Marie Eugene to say, "I understand mercy. St. Therese of the Child Jesus felt the softness. I feel the power."

It was that power which helped Mary fulfill her mission – from the Annunciation to the Visitation to the Foot of the Cross to Pentecost! It is that power that sustained Blessed Marie Eugene, who always wanted to see God, to behold him. It is power of His Mercy that comes from the Spirit, that sustains us now.

I conclude with the words of Blessed Marie Eugene:

This is the testament I leave you: may the grace of the Holy Spirit descend upon you, that you might all be able to say as soon as possible that the Holy Spirit is your Friend, that the Holy Spirit is your Light, that the Holy Spirit is your Master.