

Solemn Novena to St. Ann

100th Anniversary

July 19, 2024

Preaching of Rev. Justin Nelson Alphonse, C.P.

Last Friday, I had gone to bless one of the Nigerian family home in Birmingham, in Louisville, Kentucky. And here is a family who is so dedicated and so they live their faith to the full. And we had rosary together with their four children and their parents. And we prayed. One of the oldest daughters, who is 14 years old, she led the rosary.

And then I blessed the house, the home. And as we were talking in our dining room, having a meal together, and they were sharing about their faith experience. And they said, Father, we begin our day at 6.30, we all come together and we read the Scripture together and we spend a few minutes of silence and meditate on the Word of God.

And then the kids go to school and we go to work. And they do it every day without fail. And kids are so excited even to pray the rosary. And they say, Father, even when we travel in the car by 6, the kids will say, Dad, Mom, shall we pray the rosary? And that kind of faith that this Nigerian family had. And one of the little boys, who is only four years old, last lent as we were praying the Stations of the Cross. And as he was walking the Stations, and he came to the Stations where Jesus falls the third time. And then he turns towards his dad and says, Dad, we should not allow Jesus to fall for the fourth time. Dad, we should not allow Jesus to fall on the fourth time. What a beautiful faith of this four-year little boy.

And as I said two days ago, look back and thank God. And look forward and trust God. Look above and praise God. Look around and serve God. Look within and find God. As I talk to many of the pilgrims who come here, I have been coming personally for the last 10 years. And I have seen the faith of this community. I have seen the faith of people who come here, who have been coming here for 30 years, 50 years, 70 years, and that shows the faith of this community. And people who come from New York, from Pennsylvania, from Washington, D.C., from Virginia, all over, they come to express their faith in St. Ann's Solemn Novena and express their faith in God.

And every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we share that faith. And the mystery of faith, Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again. And we live that faith.

In today's Gospel we heard where the official who had lost his daughter just now, and he has that great faith that Jesus could heal her daughter if he lays his hand on her. And what a wonderful faith that he had. And Jesus goes behind him and follows him to his home. And on his way, this woman who had been suffering for the last 12 years, and if I could touch the cloth of Jesus, that I will be healed. And she touches the cloth of Jesus, and Jesus turns around and says, who touched me? And here is a woman who comes forward, I touched you. Courage, daughter, your faith has saved you.

And we see in the Gospel where the centurion who comes and pleads for healing for his servant who was suffering. And Jesus says, okay, I will come. And the centurion says these beautiful words, I am unworthy for you to enter into my house. Just say a word, and my servant will be healed. And then he goes on to say that I am a man of authority. When I say to my soldiers, do this, and he does it. Come here, and he comes. And go, and he goes. And looking at this faith of the centurion, Jesus says to his followers who are following around him, I have not seen such a great faith like this man in the whole of Israel.

Here is a centurion who believed in the power of Jesus. And Jesus gets excited when he sees the faith in the people. And I'm sure Jesus is so happy when he sees hundreds and thousands of people who come here to show and express their faith in the solemn novena.

In 1946, they had 330,000 people attending this solemn novena. And if you get a chance, go and visit the beautiful archives that they have at the basement. A wonderful way how people have been expressing their faith.

And how do we express our faith? There are three ways that I encourage you to do. One is to learn. To learn the Scripture. As St. Jerome beautifully says, ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ. And so, let us learn. Spend a few minutes to learn the Scripture. And then, listen to the Word of God. Listen to people who speak the Word of God. Who teach the Word of God. Who gives homily. And as we listen to the Word of God, learn about Jesus. Who Jesus is. And finally, live that Word of God. Live that Word. The Word, whatever we hear, the Word that is spoken, when we live that Word and act upon them, is a wise man who builds his house on a rock foundation.

God wants all of us to build a house that is built on rock. Let us build our faith on that faith. As St. Paul beautifully tells in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 7, we walk by faith, not by sight. Amen.