

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
175TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDATION OF SAINT FRANCIS UNIVERSITY
MEMORIAL OF OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY
LORETTO, PENNSYLVANIA
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My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the personal representative of the Holy Father, I want to express the Holy Father's personal closeness and heartfelt congratulations to all of you as you celebrate the 175th anniversary of Saint Francis University, assuring you also of the prayers of Pope Francis. I greet all the members of the clergy, the members of the Board, faculty, administrators, and students.

In 1847, stewarding the vision of Saint Francis of Assisi, six Franciscan brothers departed Roundstone, Ireland, to fulfill a mission to educate the local population, while imbuing them with the spirituality of the poor man from Assisi and strengthening the Catholic faith. They cleared land in the forests of Loretto, and built a school on top of the mountain, seeking to draw the hearts and minds of the faithful to God. Their vision was rooted in their faith in God whom they served.

In his letter to the Galatians, in our First Reading, Saint Paul identifies that the Judaized Christians in Galatia were behaving as if they were saved by the completion of the works of the Mosaic law rather than by faith. This happens in our spiritual practices even to this day; we do things more out of routine than from a living faith. We can treat the Mass as something readily available to us, but not let the gift of the Eucharist touch our lives. Today is the Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary. We can recite our Our Fathers and Hail Marys without really entering into prayer. Faith can become something purely formal, external to our lives rather than transformative. We adopt the mentality that just because we "check the boxes" that we will be alright rather than being concerned about having a living relationship with God, growing in holiness, and growing in His image and likeness.

Today's Gospel places before us the need to make a decisive act of faith – to choose to stand with Christ in a meaningful way. In this section of the Gospel, Jesus has just expelled a demon from a person who was deaf and mute. Rather than rejoice in this healing, people question Jesus and His authority. It is a sign of the rejection that Jesus will suffer as He journeys to Jerusalem.

First, they say that He drives out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, and then, to tempt Him, they ask Jesus for a sign of His authority, as if it were not enough that He had just expelled the demon or performed any of His other miracles! Jesus patiently responds to these objections.

To accuse Jesus of casting out demons by Satan's power shows the degree of resistance to Jesus' mission. Jesus demonstrates their faulty reason by posing a question: If Satan is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Jesus does not cast out demons by the devil's power rather by the finger of God. He is the Son of God; it is by His power and authority that the devil is cast out. Jesus then declares some Good News: If He casts out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God is at hand. The Good News is twofold: God and His Kingdom are near, and the kingdom of Satan is in retreat.

Jesus, always the great teacher, then uses a parable to explain. Satan is like a strong man, but Jesus is stronger than Satan. John the Baptist has said that “one mightier than he” would be coming, and that was Jesus, who came in the “power of the Spirit.” Jesus overcomes Satan, especially through the blood of His Cross, His descent among the dead, and His glorious Resurrection. He divides the spoils of His victory with us.

Thus, a choice must be made by those listening to the parable: will you stand with Jesus or against? One cannot remain neutral. Do you want victory or defeat? Jesus has come to gather all of God’s children; those who oppose Him seek to scatter and divide. You must choose. In theology, we speak of *fides quae* and *fides qua*. The former refers to the content of our Faith; the latter to the act of faith.

Ten years ago, Pope Benedict XVI opened the Year of Faith, and he described this act of faith:

“Faith is choosing to stand with the Lord so as to live with him. ... Faith, precisely because it is a free act, also demands social responsibility for what one believes. The Church on the day of Pentecost demonstrates with utter clarity this public dimension of believing and proclaiming one’s faith fearlessly to every person. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit that makes us fit for mission and strengthens our witness, making it frank and courageous.”
(Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, 11 October 2011, 10)

“To stand with the Lord so as to live with Him”: this describes the decisive choice that must be made. Jesus warns that if an unclean spirit goes out of a person, it may try to return with seven other spirits, thereby worsening a person’s condition. In other words, He wants to say that conversion and commitment cannot be lukewarm or half-hearted. A “home”, that is, our heart cannot remain unoccupied for very long; we have to choose, whether our hearts will be the place where the Holy Spirit dwells and where Jesus is our Welcome Guest.

Today, the Church celebrates the Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary. The Rosary itself is called a Compendium of the Gospel, and it invites us to meditate on the lives of Christ and Mary. Mary, in faith, made a decisive choice for God by saying, “*Let it be done to me according to your word.*” She was a woman of faith. On this day in 1571, the Holy League, a coalition of Catholic states, banded together to ward off an invasion of Christendom by the fleet of the Ottoman Empire, winning a decisive battle at Lepanto. Saint Pius V, who was Pope at the time, asked everyone to pray the Rosary. We see that the true victory was won, not by weapons of war, but by the power of God. We see what can be accomplished by acts of faith when the Christian people unite in prayer.

Today, we give thanks to God for those brave souls who set out in faith from Ireland to found this university and to all who have contributed generation after generation to handing on the gift of faith here at St. Francis. Anniversaries are celebrations not only of the great deeds of the past, but they are opportunities to look forward in hope. May Our Lady of the Rosary help us to see the good things God has planned for us through the eyes of faith, through which we are saved.