

The will of the Father must be our only desire

Homily of Bishop Samuel Aquila, D.D.
Mass of Religious Profession, Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart
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When I received the phone call from one of the Sisters asking me to come and celebrate this liturgy, my heart was filled with joy. I knew some of the Sisters for several years, and I met some of the Sisters who are making their vows today in the novitiate when they were first making the baby steps in their religious vocation, in the life to which God is calling them.

I am asking the Lord to pour forth His grace and blessing upon you, and I am asking the Lord to grant you the joy of your foundress, Sister Ida. She knew well the intimacy with God -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit -- for she dwelled in the Trinitarian Love while she was here on earth. She showed all of us that this is possible.

In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus reminds us of the call to love as we are loved by Him, "As the Father has loved me, so I also love you. Remain in my love." The call is given to each one of us, the call to love as Christ loves the Father and the Father loves Christ.

As the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit make themselves total gifts to one another, so are you, my dear Sisters, called to total self-giving love, to give yourselves to Jesus Christ as His brides and live in a nuptial relationship with Him and with His Church.

That total gift of love, giving yourselves, is like a blazing fire that deep waters cannot quench. Once we experience true love, the love of God, that fire is everlasting, that fire is unquenchable, and one can only hunger for it more and yearn to enter into it more deeply. Sister Ida knew this love. Sister Ida lived this love.

St. John reminds us that God is Love, and the only way that Love is truly possible is in relationship. That is why there are three Persons in the one God. Jesus Christ revealed to us the depth of God's love for us; that as the three persons of God make the total gift of Self in their love for one another, so too are we called to this love within the very state of life to which we are called.

In the words of Sister Ida, in reference to the medal you wear, "the flame on the cross is a symbol of the love of Christ. Love is action." Love must be active in your lives. You must be like Jesus Christ who gives Himself to all. You must be like Mary, the spouse of the Holy Spirit. You, my daughters, who are making perpetual vows today, you will be saying, "Yes, I accept the Holy Spirit as Mary did," so that the Word may be made flesh in your lives. Only in your "yes" to the Holy Spirit will Jesus Christ be brought forth through your lives. You are like Mary and the power of the Holy Spirit is in you as you make your perpetual vows. You take as your Spouse the Holy Spirit as Mary did.

Those of you who are renewing your temporary vows, and Sister Angela, as you make your first vows, you, too, are called to that spousal relationship, looking forward with hope to the permanent spousal relationship that will come about when you make your perpetual vows. You are called to live that self-giving Trinitarian love. You are called to live it within your own community, in the Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart. You are called to live it within the universal Church.

Your community is truly blessed. Although small in number, it reflects the universal Church. All one has to do is look at your faces to see that it is evident! It is a tremendous blessing, and it is a tremendous grace! I tell you with great hope that it will continue to grow throughout the years.

As you respond to this call by God, you are called to vow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. In poverty you will reflect that your only dependence is on God. You will make a gift of self, but it is by God's initiative that you have been called. You only responded to that call. Jesus reminds us in the Gospel, "You did not choose me, I chose you." Jesus Christ is the one who calls, who invites. He is the one who calls you to give yourself as a gift.

You recognize God's gift and you recognize in the words of Sister Ida that God is your only real Treasure. God supplies ALL for you! You know this, and you serve as a reminder to the world that all will pass away, that nothing on this earth is permanent or forever.

It is a tremendous reminder for us who live in a materialistic world and society. One thing only is sure: that each and every one of us is going to die. Our life here on earth is only a pilgrimage. Our true home is heaven. The life of poverty in your vocation reminds us of this great truth that our homes, our cars, our work and everything we have will one day be gone. The one thing that remains is the eternal love of God. This is what your vow of poverty reveals to us. Through it, we recognize our deep dependence upon God.

Poverty reveals that it is not so much who you are, what you are before God or what you have; the important thing is that God has loved you and called you His Beloved. You are His Beloved as lived in the vow of Chastity.

Your vow of Chastity gives us a sign of the Kingdom of God that is to come. It is a sign saying that we look forward to His Kingdom. In the second reading, St. Paul's letter to the Romans, he reminds us that we have come to a new life, that we live the newness of Jesus Christ. That is what the vow of Chastity signifies to us.

It also reflects, my dearest Sisters, the nuptial dignity of the human body. You are called to be truly feminine. You are called to a feminine vocation, a Marian vocation. Mary lived in a chaste marriage with Joseph. Learn from Mary, seek her out, let her take you to understand the chastity to which you are called. As every woman, you are called to be mothers in some way, to the children and young people you teach, to the adults and

elderly whom you serve. You become mothers and sisters to all. I remember when my own mother was dying; how much your foundress, Sister Ida, was mother and sister to my mother, even though she was suffering from cancer herself. She nurtured my mother and cared for her spiritually. That was her vocation throughout her life.

Never think of Chastity as a sacrifice. Chastity is a gift that allows you to become fully human and live in Jesus Christ, and live the Gospel. Chastity calls you to an undivided heart. It calls you to imitate the Heart of Christ and Mary who gave themselves completely, totally and chastely.

You have one mission, and that is union with God. That mission can only be lived through Obedience. Obedience flows from both Chastity and Poverty. In Obedience you say, "I come to do the will of God." Jesus teaches us that the will of the Father is His only desire, His only goal, and that must be true for all of us.

We see this in Mary's Fiat, in the way she prayed, "Let it be done to me according to your word. I am the servant of the Lord."

We see it in Gethsemane when Jesus prayed, "Not my will, but your will be done." We hear it in the Our Father when we pray the words, "Thy will be done." You are called to utter these words -- to be obedient.

We live in a society and in a time that does not want to hear what we hear. We live in a society whose theme song is "I did it my way!" Nothing could be further from the Gospel. Nothing could be further from Jesus Christ. Nothing could be further from any state of life in the Church, whether it be marriage, whether it be the consecrated life or whether it be the sacrament of Holy Orders. All states of life are called to obedience, the gift of one's self, the obedience of doing it God's way, saying, "Not my will be done but yours."

My dearest Sisters, the way to Poverty, Chastity and Obedience is through humility, prayer and the sacraments. Humility is absolutely essential! It is the essential virtue for all the other virtues. Humility is open to receiving; it is open to saying "Yes." The only way we can have the gift that God desires to give us is if we are open, if we recognize our poverty and surrender to Him in humility.

The only way that can happen is through prayer: meditative prayer, prayer on Sacred Scripture, private prayer in solitude, going into deeper union with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Spending time in prayer is essential; it sustains you in your vocation.

Also essential are the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation. Those two sacraments are essential for every vocation, for they nourish our vocations whether we are husband and wife, in the single life, or in the consecrated life, Holy Orders. The Eucharist is the heart of each one of the sacraments.

The Eucharist reminds us of the total self-gift to which we are called. As Jesus said, “This is my body, given for you. This is my blood poured out for you.” Every priest must speak those words to the people whom he serves. Every priest and bishop must speak them in the diocese in which he serves. Every husband and wife must be able to look their spouse in the eye and utter those words to each other. “This is my body given for you. This is my blood poured out for you.” As consecrated women, you have to make those words your words, as you offer your life to Jesus Christ, giving your body and your blood to Him, and giving it to the Church in service to her. As bride, you utter these words to Jesus Christ.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation helps us to grow in holiness, helps us to nourish that union with God more deeply. Have a deep love for that sacrament and celebrate it regularly.

My dear Sisters, you are devoted to the Sacred Heart, you belong to that Society. As I reflected on the life of Sister Ida, I looked at two important events that occurred in her life on Mary’s feast. I believe that those events are providential, for it shows the Marian dimension of your vocation. The first is Sister Ida’s date of birth on October 7, 1922. The second event is her first vows which she professed on October 7, 1940, the Feast of the Holy Rosary.

Sister Ida said, “Jesus chose Mary to be the prototype of the Bride who loves Him with an undivided heart.” She speaks those words even today from heaven to you, on the day of your profession. She reminds you that you are called to be the prototype of the Bride as Mary was called. Mary is always leading us, and particularly you, in your vocation to the Heart of her Son. For the Hearts of Jesus and Mary are united. They live in obedience to one another.

My dearest Sisters, today, as you make your vows, you are called upon to reflect on the words of Jesus in today’s Gospel, “Love one another” and “Remain in my love.” Then Jesus goes on to explain. “I have told you this that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete.” The mark of one who is truly living in His love is joy, the joy that we saw in the life of Sister Ida, the joy that we see in one another. Joy even in the midst of suffering is a sign of knowing Jesus – “Yes, I am loved by God. Yes, I know that I give myself as Mary and Jesus gave themselves totally.”

So, may you live your vocation faithfully all the days of your lives. May the Lord continue to strengthen you as He pours forth His Spirit upon you, to strengthen your hearts and your minds to persevere in the call that He has given you.

He has chosen you, and He calls you His friends. May you respond with Mary today, and make her words yours: “Let it be done to me according to your word.”

God bless you.