

“Blessed Eyes and Blessed Ears”
Homily of Metropolitan Nicholas of Detroit
Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament
Detroit, Michigan
July 25, 2018

Your Excellency Archbishop Vigneron, my Beloved Brother in the service of Christ, Distinguished Brother Hierarchs, Rev. Clergy and Members of the Religious Orders, Beloved Faithful and Friends of the community of the Most Blessed Sacrament Cathedral here in Detroit, and fellow faithful from throughout the Detroit metropolitan area, Christ is in our midst! If we close our eyes and think for a moment, we can all still hear that call from our childhood: “Look up in the sky! It’s a bird, it’s a plane, it’s....Superman!”

Yes, its true, that our American culture has always had a tremendous fascination with Superheroes. They were the secret people we all thought we could be – especially because the superhero culture centered on doing what was right and good. Superheroes always solved problems. And if we ask our children what they remember, they will all tend to know the sentiment spoken to Peter Parker, aka Spiderman, by his Uncle Ben: “With great power comes great responsibility.”

Listen to that again: “With great power comes great responsibility.” How true! And if we adjusted that statement into our Christian vernacular we would say: “With great *blessing* comes great responsibility.” But perhaps we should just go right to the source and quote it from the Gospel according to Luke where Jesus states: “From everyone who has been given much, much will be required.” (Luke 12:48)

We look at this gift of blessing and its reciprocal expectation today, particularly in light of the reading we just heard from the Gospel of Matthew, in which Jesus Christ announces to His disciples the great blessing that had been bestowed on them:

“Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”

Blessed eyes and blessed ears ... it's a strange idea....

But what can that mean? What is being said to the Apostles?

Is it saying that the Apostles' eyes and ears are more blessed than those of Isaiah the prophet, who seven centuries earlier had a vision of the Virgin who would conceive and bear a son who would be “God with Us”?

Does it suggest that the eyes and ears of the Apostles are more blessed than the eyes and ears of King David, who ten centuries earlier received a promise from God that the Messiah would come from his own house and lineage, as we chanted in the Psalm this evening?

Could it even mean more blessed than the eyes and ears of Moses, who fifteen centuries earlier received the Law on Mount Sinai, and who marveled to know that one day there would come a son of Abraham who would perfectly fulfill all of the commandments of God.

My beloved, even in the face of all those who came before the birth of Jesus Christ, in the face of all the prophets and forebears of our God in the Flesh, it is even of these holy persons and others that Christ did say:

“Many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”

And what is it that the Disciples witnessed that the righteous men and women before them did not hear and see? Signs? Miracles? Wonders in the heavens? No, in these ways God's power had always been manifest throughout the ages for His people.

In truth, what the disciples saw and heard was something more strange and mysterious indeed:

They beheld the absolute condescension of the Most High God.

They saw the Divine Humility that was willing to leave the heavenly realm of perfection and enter into the brokenness of our world.

They saw the Son of God take human form, not as a king or conqueror, but as the child of a lowly Virgin girl.

They saw Immortality itself come down to this Earth, to this valley of the shadow of death, choosing for His family an aged couple soon to perish without offspring— namely, Saints Joachim and Anna, to whose glory and intercessory prayer this evening's vigil is dedicated.

More than the healing miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ; more than His authority over the wind and the waves; more than His power to open blind eyes and deaf ears: *we marvel* at how the Infinite God stoops down to our finite existence in order to walk with us, to help us, to heal us, and to call us to Himself.

And for this **mercy** to our human race, He endured scoffing and slander, hostility and rejection, pain and death. Stop and consider that if the source of all sin is the wounded pride of Satan, the medicine for the world is the indescribable humility of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so we soon shall sing together:

*Christ, thou art our glorious King, Son of God enthroned in splendor;
But deliverance to bring thou all honors didst surrender,
And wast of a virgin born humbly on that blessed morn.
Thou didst take the sting from death, Son of God, as Savior given;
On the cross thy dying breath opened wide the realm of heaven.
In the glory of that land thou are set at God's right hand.*

Blessed eyes and blessed ears, which saw and heard such wondrous love in the flesh! But with this great blessing came great responsibility for those first disciples. They were called—not only to witness Christ’s humble love in action—but also to embrace it, to enter into it themselves, and to continue that ministry of self-emptying – the condescending ministry of Christ through their own Apostolic labors. For this cause they went forth into all the world as men lowly and despised, preaching, teaching, suffering and dying.

They followed the Lord into death as His witnesses, exhibiting like Him that ultimate humility.

Blessed eyes and blessed ears, that obtained a better resurrection for bearing the marks of martyrdom! (cf. Hebrews 11:35)

Blessed hands like those of Saint Peter, which bore the print of the nails like our Lord’s!

Blessed sides like those of Saint Paul, which bore the stripes of the lash like the Christ!

Blessed brows like those of all the Apostles, who received the “crown of righteousness,” which the Lord, the righteous Judge, awards to all His faithful servants! (cf. 2 Timothy 4:8).

Blessed eyes and blessed ears, that now see the celestial glories God has prepared for those that love Him (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:9), and that hear His voice declare, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (cf. Matthew 25:23).

Blessed eyes and blessed ears, that in the life beyond death experience and join in the never-ending worship of the bodiless angelic powers of heaven, of which our earthly liturgy is but a shadow and imitation.

But this privilege, this blessedness, was not just for the Apostles or for the earliest martyrs and saints. This blessing is for us as well.

That which the prophets and righteous people of old longed to see and hear, we ourselves have known and witnessed in the life of the Church. For the Church remains the Body of Christ. And down through the ages, and even to this day, the Body of Christ suffers in humility for the sake of its faith and its testimony.

To be a Christian in this day and age is to invite scorn and derision.

To be a Christian in our time and place is to experience rejection and reviling.

To read the Bible nowadays and to believe its message is to be labeled a fanatic.

To wear a cross around your neck is to be identified as an oppressor.

To live chastely and to be an advocate of modesty is to be vilified as an oddball.

To wear a clergy collar in our society is to be stigmatized as a person with a personality disorder.

In many ways, the Church is returning to the original conditions in which she was born. The pagans of the earliest centuries of our era said much the same about the first generations of Christians—they were foolish, fanatical, superstitious, and subversive. Because of this attitude, the members of the early Church suffered in many ways at the hands of their neighbors, and in certain cases, even at the hands of family and friends.

But those Christians bore up bravely under persecution. They were able to do so for one simple reason: *they knew the why*. They knew not just the

Who and the What of their faith: they knew *why* they chose to follow the King of Kings who gave his life for us all. They knew *why* his Word was truth for they witnessed His resurrection.

Yes my friends, they knew *why* they were followers of Christ and members of His Church—not out of habit, or convenience, or custom, but out of conscience and conviction.

They knew *why* their beliefs and morals were at odds with society, because their eyes were opened to the emptiness and despair of pagan lifestyles.

They knew *why* their faith was persecuted and why they were hated, because they recognized the spiritual warfare that surrounded them.

They knew *why* they put their trust in Christ as God, because their eyes had seen and their ears had heard what others longed to know, and that those early Christians had the blessing of experiencing—*that the way of humility and self-emptying love was God's way.*

Those Christian forebears realized that by setting aside pride and pretension, by regarding every one as a neighbor and embracing fellow believers as brothers and sisters, that this was the only thing that can bring light and joy and meaning and purpose to a world darkened by sin and hatred and spiritual ignorance.

They had the same blessed eyes and blessed ears as the Apostles, for they too had experienced the truth of the Resurrection, they too had experienced the power of God in themselves—the power to repent, the power to be forgiven and to forgive freely, the power to control the baser impulses of human nature, the power to live for eternity rather than just for today.

People of God, beloved in the Lord,

“Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear.”

We feel ourselves, I think, to be ordinary people. Certainly, none of us “identifies” as a superhero, I’m sure. And yet to us—to each one of us—has a blessing been given, a very great blessing.

We have seen and heard what others in our world long to see and hear but do not experience. You and I have known the power of God coming to us through the way of humility and meekness.

Have we not known this through the love of Christian parents and grandparents and godparents.

Do we not realize this through the ministry of the clergy—bishops, priests, and deacons—and through the lay ministers, parish councils, and helpers in every parish, including Parochial and Sunday School teachers who offer countless hours of service.

We have known this through the lives of the saints, whose memories and images surround us in this holy cathedral.

And in truth, we have known the way of God through the sacramental life of the Church, as we experience week by week the utter condescension of the Son of God -- that He would come to us humbly under the visible forms of bread and wine, that He would enter into our hearts and bodies to make His life our own, that He would share His Holy Spirit to dwell in us and guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

And through what we have seen and heard, together we have experienced that which so many men and women and children around the world have yet to realize for themselves. We have been blessed to have an understanding as to WHY we are choosing the path of Christ. Yes, sometimes we bury it behind the shadows that cover this world. Well, we might think, I am a Christian because that is how my family raised

me...but you and I must go from banal custom to the bold statement of Why and How God has changed our lives

We have been given *a sense of ultimate worth and value*, not merely as creatures on this big planet, but as unique children of God, as sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father. We have come to know, as did Saints Joachim and Anna, that we are not forgotten by God, not alone, not abandoned; but that in His time and in His ways, God's perfect will shall come to pass for all of us, to heal, to help, and to bless. We know that we believe in Him because of what He has done for us...

And knowing one's own inestimable worth in God's eyes, our minds and hearts have been strengthened to live life according to a higher calling—the life of *AGAPE*, the life of love in imitation of the divine love.

This has been our blessing and for this reason you and I are gathered here this evening. But with this blessing comes the responsibility, in living out that Christlike love, for us to go and share it. To spread the news to those around us, that we are more than just another species of animal here on earth: that we are precious and glorious, that we have the potential to be holy and pure, without spot or wrinkle, citizens of eternity, destined for immortality, through our relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

It can be a scary thing to be a witness for Christ. Often, though, what we sometimes fear more than anything else in our present world is the opinion of others, who might see as oddballs, fanatics, and deviants, just as was said about the earliest Christians. What is needed is for us to follow the path of humility ourselves, to let go of our pride and vainglory, to worry not about pleasing other people (regardless of how they perceive God) and to concern ourselves always and only with pleasing God.

This is the mind of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This was the mind of Saint Anna.

This was the mind of the Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary.

This is the mind that should dwell in us today and always.

"Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear."

Blessed henceforth be your mouths that speak the wonders of God,
Blessed henceforth be your hands that do the will of God,
Blessed henceforth be your feet that walk in the ways of God,
Blessed henceforth be your hearts that beat high with joy in that living faith
of the Church through all the ages.

Blessed Be God, forever and ever! Amen.