

Homily – March 15, 2020

Today on the 200th Anniversary of the Death of St. Clement Hofbauer, we are beginning a Jubilee Year inviting us to deepen our appreciation for this great Redemptorist Saint so that we can continue to follow his example and “preach the Gospel ever anew!”

It would be especially appropriate for us to begin this Jubilee Year in Vienna, the city in which St. Clement died on March 15, 1820. Unfortunately, that event was cancelled due to Covid 19! So, from Rome, we are inaugurating this Jubilee. St. Clement is known as the “Patron of Vienna” and “Apostle of Warsaw”. In both cities today, there will be smaller and simpler celebrations in his honour, and we are united in solidarity with them.

Clement insisted that every Sunday Homily must begin with the Gospel. So, in the spirit of St. Clement, we begin this Jubilee Year reflecting on the Gospel for this Third Sunday of Lent – the story of the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at Jacob’s Well in Sychar.

Like the Samaritan Woman at the Well, Clement Hofbauer met Jesus Christ and it changed his life forever. It transformed him. He too had been offered that ‘living water’ which welled up within him! And he cultivated this gift through the practice of constant prayer and dialogue with Christ. His trusted friend, Fr. Bartholomew Pajalich reports: “Clement lived a very busy life in Vienna. He had only a single room which stood open to everyone. There he created in his own heart a solitude, a quiet cell, a small oratory. Into this solitude of his own heart he withdrew at pleasure, at all times, wherever he chanced to be. Even when he was walking through the most crowded streets of Vienna, in this way he would go deep into himself.” And from those depths of communion with the Redeemer, he drew the springs of living water that he shared with others.

Again, like the Samaritan Woman who left her water jug at the Well and ran to share her experience with her neighbours, Clement left everything – family, Tasswitz, Moravia – to share the Good News with the poor and the abandoned. He was called the “Father of the Poor” because the poor, the abandoned and the marginalized found in him a companion and sincere friend. He had a great gift for friendship. He was close to the people of his time, and especially to the ‘little ones’. Yes, he also spoke with the educated and learned, with politicians and nobles. But he always had a special care and concern for the abandoned and the poor. He offered them a faith to “satisfy the heart”, as he wrote to the Holy Father.

Clement longed to share this faith which satisfies the heart that thirsts for God, and this desire became the energy and force behind his commitment to preach the Gospel ever anew. To carry out this mission, he formed lay men and women to become missionaries, as well as Oblates of the Congregation.

Like St. Alphonsus, St. Clement knew how to live in communion with God and, at the same time, to be close to the abandoned and the poor. For Clement, the interior life and apostolic activity form one harmonious communion. He embodies the ideal of the Redemptorist *Vita Apostolica*. He is a man of prayer and a man with a mission.

Finally, St. Clement is a man of unflinching hope, and, as St. Paul tells us in the ready today, “this hope does not disappoint because the love of God had been poured into his heart through the Holy Spirit!” Remember that for more than 30 years, St. Clement laboured to establish the Redemptorist Congregation in Northern Europe. Not one of his foundations survived his death. He was exiled from Warsaw, forbidden to establish the Redemptorists in Vienna, and all his works in Prussia, Germany, Switzerland and Romania were closed by the authorities. Humanly speaking, his quest ended in failure. But Clement never gave up hope. Defeat would not have the final word.

It seems to me that in Europe today – ***in the world today*** – we need such people of unflinching hope, people like St. Clement. Perhaps this is the greatest legacy he bequeaths to us.

To conclude this Homily, I give the word to St. Clement himself:

“Courage! God is in charge! He guides everything for his glory and for our good. Let us be guided by God and all will be well... This is the only thing we have to keep in mind: Let us be strong in heart and encourage each other to do good. Let us treat one another with love.”

Fr. Michael Brehl, C.Ss.R.