

CCEE, Commission of Family & Life  
Mass, 10 May 2023  
Homily of Archbishop Leo Cushley

In preparation for Mass today, I noticed that the following saints are being celebrated. First there is St Comgall (+602), founder of a great monastery in Ireland and part of the great wave of brave Irish monks and nuns who evangelised or re-evangelised Western Europe. Then there is St Antonino of Florence, canonised for his closeness to the poor in Florence but remembered more nowadays as the founder of S. Marco monastery, where today we find many works of the great affreschi of Frà Angelico. Then there is St John of Avila, who went to the Council of Trent and works through many hardships, setbacks and jealousy to bring its reforms to Spain. And, closer to our times, St Damian, Father Damian of Molokai, who accepted the “sentence of death” as it then was, to serve the lepers at a time when there was no cure for leprosy and closeness to lepers meant a short life.

I mention all these people, in this European context, simply to illustrate how, simply in today’s own liturgy, we see the Church in Europe in many different ages, and the contribution of people of faith to this continent. It is encouraging to us to evoke them, and they deserve to be remembered for their heroism.

The readings of the day also have something to teach us and our commission. The first reading (Acts 15:1-6) describes one of the first great crises in the life of the early Church. If we put to one side the early debates about the divinity of Christ, the first great watershed was the crisis over circumcision. To us, this seems very remote, but I point it out not because of the “what” of the question”, but because of the “how” – how the Church resolved a problem that threatened to split it bitterly. The threat to the unity of the unity of the Church is as important today as it was then, and so observing how the Church overcame these difficulties – as interpreted through the eyes of St Luke – is a very helpful lesson to us all. We can see how the Church worked hard to resolve its problems, in all charity, referring it ultimately to the guidance of the Apostles.

Today’s Gospel passage (Jn 15:1-8) develops the idea to a degree. There the Lord says, “I am the vine, you are the branches”. Can we go it alone without Jesus? Can know better than the rest of the vine? Can we really decide independently that we know better? Or do I remain part of Christ? Can I remain part of Christ if I go my own way?

My dear friends, for my own part, I cannot see another way to be faithful to Christ, to be faithful to the tradition handed down to us, to be faithful I to the people I serve, than to endeavour to remain a part of the Vine as best I can. I can’t live other people’s lives; I can only live my own I can only be a faithful disciple, like those faithful saints I mentioned earlier, and perhaps inspire and others to be faithful.

But I should add that I cannot live the faith alone. If we do, we cut ourselves off from the Vine, and we with and die and burnt. We can only live as faithful members of the Vine. So, as we hear in the Gospel, let Christ make a home in us; let His Word have a home in us; let us listen to him in our hearts, and we will learn what we may ask for. Let’s bear what little fruit we can, living in the Lord, and thus being his faithful disciples. Amen.