

GOOD FRIDAY 2010

Homily given by Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC

St. Peter's Church in Volo

2 April 2010

When one travels to Europe it is usually to see the monuments and art of “Old Europe”—all of the physical remnants of centuries of Christian European culture, a rapidly disappearing Christendom in countries that have now become post-Christian because the actual living culture of “Old Europe” that produced these great works, isn't seen much anymore. But thirty years ago, when I was studying in Poland, I had the rare opportunity to still witness a hint of the beauty and elegance of that old culture. Among those I had the privilege to know was a charming, soft-spoken and very delicately refined older woman, Helena Sabińska by name, whom I had the pleasure to meet through a good friend of mine. At that time, the woman lived a very simple life in a small two-room apartment in one of those ugly communist-era apartment blocks. But she had once been the wife of a wealthy aristocrat. They owned a mansion in Lwów, as well as a large estate in the country with many servants. As a member of the privileged class, she had a stateliness about her but at the same time, was exceptionally modest and unpretentious in her comportment. She was a deeply devout Catholic.

After the Second World War, when the Soviets annexed that part of Poland, confiscating all of their property, they fled to Krakow where they lived in the back room of an apartment that belonged to some relatives. She had lost everything, so when she spoke of her former life, there was sometimes a hint of sadness and nostalgia—but never anger or bitterness. She spoke of so many interesting things from that past age of elegance but the one thing that I have never forgotten was when she once remarked: “People of culture never allow themselves to be offended.” It was an attitude that certainly belonged to an earlier age of gracious and refined culture but it was, at the same time, a deeply Catholic sentiment in its essence.

In the last few days, without realizing it, we have been witnessing a rare glimmer of that former culture of “Old Europe” which has managed to survive here and there in pockets throughout a changed Europe. In the face of ravenous attacks by the press in an attempt to implicate Pope Benedict in pedophilia scandals from years past, he has remained calm, seemingly unmoved, unphased. Many in the Church have stepped forward in his defense but he has continued on, presiding over the liturgies of Holy Week and delivering profound homilies as if nothing had happened. Just like Helena Sabińska, he is conducting himself as a person of culture, who has not allowed himself to be offended.

But truthfully, these are really terrifying times in which we live. Never before has the Church been attacked in this manner with a direct assault on the Holy Father himself, with allegations that have no basis in fact and a major world newspaper that was once known for its journalistic excellence and balance. It's like that passage in Psalm 22 written by King David, which actually was an uncanny foreshadowing of Our Lord's Passion and death: “Many bulls have surrounded me, fierce bulls of Bashan close me in. Against me they open wide their jaws, like lions, rending and roaring.”¹ Such have been the editors and writers of the New York Time and their co-conspirators. Like the

Lamentations written by the Prophet Jeremiah, which we heard today in the morning Office of Tenebrae: “With fierce looks they have cruelly struck me, and given me vinegar to drink.” “My adversary rose up and said: ‘Come together and make haste to devour Him.’ And so they cast me into a lonely desert and all the earth mourned for me, because there was none that would acknowledge me and do good to me.” As the Prophet Isaiah wrote, He is being led like a lamb to the slaughter.²

So, as we commemorate today, the Passion and Death of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Benedict XVI, who has been called to be His Vicar on earth, is living through his own passion in imitation of the one, who died for him and whose Church has been placed in his care. It is truly amazing how someone could even conceive of making such horrendous charges against a man, who has done so much to put things right in the Church, how “how this Pontiff, despite his evangelical meekness and honesty, the clarity of his words joined to the depth of his thought and of his teachings, [could] arouse in some places sentiments of disgust and forms of anti-clericalism that it was believed had been surmounted.”³

The essence of what is going on behind these vile attacks on one, who least of anyone deserves them, can be best summed up in a statement released a few days ago by Marcello Pera, President of the Italian Senate from the years 2001-2006. These accusations are “a direct attack against the Pope” and show that “there is a war going on. And this war is targeted not against the Pope himself ... No, the war is between secularism and Christianity. The secularists know that if mud were splashed on the white robe, it would stain the church, and if the church is stained, so would the Christian religion. ... This war against Christianity would not be so dangerous if Christians understood what was going on. Instead a great majority of them live in incomprehension. Theologians are frustrated by the intellectual supremacy of Benedict XVI. There are unsure bishops who believe that compromising with modernity is the best way to update the Christian message. There are cardinals suffering a crisis of faith who are beginning to suggest that priestly celibacy is not a dogma and that it would perhaps be better to reconsider it. There are plush Catholic intellectuals who think that there is a feminine question within the Church and an unresolved problem between Christianity and sexuality. ... If however one understands why he does not yield, one would then take up the battle without sitting back to await the next shot. Whoever limits himself only to showing solidarity with the Pope, is either someone who enters the Garden of Olives at night, and secretly, or is yet to understand what is going on.”⁴

It is, unfortunately, my suspicion that most Catholics have yet to understand what is going on, and who enter into their churches as into the Garden of Olives, secretly, to only leave secretly, so that no one will know that they are followers of Christ, so that they won't have to disrupt their comfortable lives in order to defend the One who died for them.

Yes. So few today recognize that we are in the midst of a cosmic war in which all the forces of hell have been unleashed upon us. In the past, it was much easier to be Catholic. Today, one is ridiculed for believing what we know is true. The Holy Father is now living through his own passion but we too, unbeknownst to the majority of Catholics now living in blissful ignorance or denial, have all entered into “the Passion” along with our Lord. The Church is once more a “suffering Church” and the Cross has been laid upon our backs to carry in imitation of Him; to follow in His footsteps; to make up in our

own bodies the sufferings that He suffered, so that we, who are still faithful to Him, could live in more perfect imitation of He, who saved us.

Today, just as that fateful Friday some 2,000 years ago, darkness has once again covered the earth. When Jeremiah wrote his lamentations centuries before Christ, little did he realize that he was alluding to that day of terror, when the awaited Messiah would be crucified. “All that passed by clapped their hands at thee; they hissed and wagged their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem. ‘Is this the city’ they said, ‘that is known as the “crown of beauty” and “joy of the whole world”.’” He wrote about the Holy City of Jerusalem in which Christ was crucified. But today, those same words speak about the new Jerusalem, the Church, the spotless bride of Christ, which should be to all the “crown of beauty” and “joy of the whole world.” But instead, the whole world hisses at Her and tries to throw Her crown in the dust.

The world has forsaken the King, who came to save her. As if prophetically about our times, Jeremiah wrote, “Her king[s] and princes, sitting in the midst of heathens are no more mindful of the law.” For we have a president, whose first official act, two days after his inauguration, was to reverse the ban that had been in place prohibiting the international funding of abortions; who opted not to hold the National Day of Prayer in the White House this year because he didn’t want to offend anyone, especially atheists, yet had no objection to a Muslim Day of Prayer in front of the Capitol Building. We have politicians, who militantly support abortion and same-sex unions. And among them we have Catholics in our government the likes of Nancy Pelosi, Joe Biden, and our very own Dick Durbin, who parade around the country talking about how they are devout Catholics, while doing everything they can to institute an oppressive totalitarian regime in which we have fewer and fewer freedoms and in which those, who are most vulnerable are now the most endangered.

God’s laws are being trampled on the ground and the Son of Man has had to once more pick up His Cross to be crucified by those whom He has called “His own.” Intellectuals are pressing a Crown of Thorns onto His precious head once again. Renegade and disobedient priests are once again driving nails into those precious hands, which held up the bread and wine in the Upper Room as he gave us His own Body and Blood. Nails are being driven into the feet of Our Savior once again by bloodstained evil politicians, and Catholics, who run to the polls to elect them.

And He is being scourged once again with blow after blow by our sins. Because we have to constantly remember that it was, in the end, as a result of all of our sins that they threw Him into a filthy dungeon, brutally whipped Him, spat upon Him, ridiculed Him and nailed Him to a cross to die in agony and humiliation. It was my sins and your sins that were the thorns that were pushed into His head and the nails that were driven into His hands and feet. These are the things that should scandalize us more than anything else; that we allowed this to happen by the very actions that we could have chosen not to do but yet did.

We are living in times of a raging cosmic war in which unbelievable evil is being unleashed upon the world. Many souls will perish but also many great saints will be raised up in its midst. One of them will be Benedict, who has, these past days, been so much on my mind and in my prayers. He has entered his own passion in imitation of His Savior, along with those of us, who are open enough to realize that the world hates us as much as they did that day when they cried “Crucify Him!”

St. Paul wrote, “Now, I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.”⁵ And so, each one of us has to do the same by carrying our own crosses in order to join ourselves to the sufferings of Christ. As you kiss the cross today in veneration, tell Him that you are sorry for your sins, which nailed Him to the cross, then pick up your crosses and follow Him up to Calvary.

¹ Psalm 22:13-14.

² Isaiah 53:7.

³ “Anti-Popes and Dangers of a Parallel Magisterium” (<http://www.zenit.org/article-28723?l=english>)

⁴ Pera, Marcello, “Paedophile priests and the war against European values,” TVEuropa (<http://www.tveuropa.net/?p=362&lang=en>).

⁵ Colossians 1:24.