

## **SAINT MARY CATHERINE KASPER, PRAY FOR US!**

*The following is the text of the homily of Bishop Rhoades at the Mass of Thanksgiving for the Canonization of Mother Mary Catherine Kasper on November 11<sup>th</sup> at the Ancilla Domini Chapel in Donaldson:*

Today we give thanks to God for the canonization of our beloved Mother Mary Catherine Kasper. Three weeks ago, in Saint Peter's Square, Mother Mary Catherine was officially declared a saint of the Church, together with six other holy men and women. One of those new saints was Pope Paul VI, who forty years ago had beatified Mother Mary Catherine. I don't know if there has ever a canonization of a pope along with someone he had beatified.

In his homily at Mother Mary Catherine's beatification Mass in 1978, Saint Paul VI said that Mother Mary Catherine's filial love for God was total and found its authentic expression in unlimited love of neighbor. He noted that this was the lesson Mother Mary Catherine left to the Church and to the world: love for God put into action through charity towards our neighbor.

At the beatification Mass, Pope Paul VI said that he was honoring all the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, whom he said the Church was inviting to emulate the luminous example of their foundress and to faithfully conserve their spiritual heritage, even more intensely from that day forward. I cannot think of better advice for our Poor Handmaids today, 40 years since now-Saint Paul VI said those words and three weeks after Saint Mary Catherine's canonization – to seek to imitate the luminous example of your holy foundress and to conserve your spiritual heritage. And what is that heritage? It is fundamentally this: love for God put into action through love of neighbor.

Saint Paul VI said that the piety and the apostolate of Mother Mary Catherine had these essential characteristics: personal poverty, love for the poor, simplicity, humility, and dedication to the service of neighbor out of love for Christ. He quoted the words of Mother Mary Catherine: "all our religious should become saints, but hidden saints." Pope Paul VI spoke of Mother Mary Catherine as a model above all of fidelity and responsibility in the small and insignificant duties of each day. She once said: "All is great that is done in God's love; nothing done for God is small." This is good for all of us to remember.

Pope Paul VI also called Mother Mary Catherine a model of longing to fulfill God's will in all the situations of life. As you well know, Mother Mary Catherine's life was focused on being available to God, on doing God's will. In one of her letters, she prayed: "Only You I want to serve and obey according to Your liking. Only You I want to love according to your most holy will, only You I want to honor and praise as you like it."

I am hoping and praying that many more people will learn about Mother Mary Catherine Kasper, now that she is Saint Mary Catherine Kasper. I am hoping to foster greater devotion to her here in our diocese. What a beautiful example she is of today's Gospel! Answering the question of the scribe about which is the first of all the commandments, Jesus recites the Shema Israel that we heard in the first reading from the book of Deuteronomy: "Hear, O Israel! (Shema, Israel!). The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength." And then our Lord adds to this a commandment from the book of Leviticus: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus is the first one known to have explicitly combined these two commandments, showing us that they are inseparable. Saint Mary Catherine knew they were inseparable. Her love for God, which was so deep and beautiful, was concretized and expressed in her love for fellow human beings, especially the poor. As Pope Paul VI said at her beatification: Mother Mary Catherine's great love for God was expressed in her unlimited love of neighbor.

Today's readings remind us of the centrality of love in both the faith of Israel and in the Christian faith. There is new depth and breadth, however, with the coming of Christ. There is new depth because "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son...." (John 3:16). There is new depth in that the one God professed by Israel now has a human face. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1: 14). And there is new breadth in that Jesus united into a single precept the commandment of love for God and love for neighbor, making them inseparable. And Jesus the Son revealed to us the depth of God's love for us. His crucifixion is "love in its most radical form." Indeed, Jesus shows us that "God is love."

We are commanded to love because love has first been given to us. Saint Mary Catherine believed this with all her heart. Love blossomed in her life as a response within her to the experience of God's love. She encountered in her life, especially in her prayer, God's love for her. She had a living relationship

with the Lord Jesus and His love. And that is why she wanted to become His poor handmaid. She learned to see others with the eyes of Christ. That doesn't happen if one's relationship with God is arid and loveless. We are unable to see and love our neighbor as ourselves or to love one another as Christ loves us unless we believe in God's love for us, like Saint Mary Catherine did. Her capacity to love and serve others was renewed every day in her daily encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist. The same with us – we need to be nourished with the sacrament of love if we are to live Jesus' commandment of love.

The great commandment of love for God and neighbor is not imposed from outside. It does not call for the impossible. It is a response from within, born from an experience of love from within, God's love for us. By its very nature, His love must be shared with others, this love that comes from God and unites us to Him.

Yesterday, we celebrated All Souls Day. We were reminded that at the end of our earthly life, every one of us will face God's judgment. At the moment of death, we will receive our eternal retribution in our immortal souls: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven immediately or through a purification (purgatory) or everlasting damnation. When I think about this judgment, I always remember the words of Saint John of the Cross: "At the sunset of our lives, we shall be judged on love." When Mother Mary Catherine died, she was judged on love. We all know the result of that judgment for her. She is now a saint!

Saint Mary Catherine teaches us that the path to heaven is the path of love. May she help us with her prayers to walk that path and to grow in holiness! Of course, that path of love is the way of the cross. At this and every Eucharist, we participate in Christ's sacrifice in which He loved us to the end. May His Body and Blood nourish and strengthen us, as it nourished and strengthened Saint Mary Catherine and all the saints, to do God's will, to love Him and to serve Him and all our brothers and sisters! Saint Mary Catherine, pray for us!