



Homily – Celebration of Cultures Massⁱ

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Archbishop of Los Angeles*

*Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angeles
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My dear brother bishops, brothers and sisters in Christ:

What a beautiful sight you all are! And what a beautiful occasion!

When I look around this great cathedral today, I'm reminded again of what makes our great Church of Los Angeles so special, so important in the life of the Church in America and the universal Catholic Church.

We are a living sign, my brothers and sisters! A living sign of what God wants his Catholic Church to be!

The word "Catholic" means *universal*. It means one communion of cultures. It means one family of families drawn from every nation, tribe, people and tongue!

In Jesus Christ, there is no east or west. No Greek or Jew.ⁱⁱ We are all one in the family of God, his Catholic Church. We are all children of God! His own sons and daughters!

In the early Church, believers were called *children of light*. Because in baptism, each of us is born again from Jesus Christ, the true Light that came into the world to enlighten every person.ⁱⁱⁱ

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." And he told his Church: "You are the light of the world."^{iv}

So this is who we are, my brothers and sisters. We are children of light! We are called, each one of us, to be a light to our neighbors and to our nation.

In our Gospel today Jesus tells the parable of the wise and foolish virgins.

In this parable the Bridegroom stands for Jesus and the ten women are a symbol of all of us, we who have been baptized into the life of Jesus.

We are sent out into this world, like these ten women. We are sent out with a mission. The mission of his Church. The mission of the new evangelization. We are sent to carry our "lamps" and commanded to let our light shine.^v

Through the witness of our lives, through our good works of love, we are called to bring the light of Christ to our world. We are called to bring the light of his charity, the light of his truth, and the light of his life to the men and women of our times.^{vi}

In our first reading for this holy Mass, Moses tells us that if we *love God* we have *to live for God*. We have to walk in his ways. We have to live by the light of his commandments and the teachings of his Church.

And we have to prove our love, my brothers and sisters — through serving the needs of our neighbors.

There is always the temptation for us to treat our faith like something that is only private and personal, something that we keep to ourselves. But we can't live an individualistic faith.

It is true: our faith in Jesus Christ *is* something that is deeply personal. We need to have a strong, personal relationship with Jesus. He should be the joy our lives!

And we need to cultivate an interior life — through prayer, through our reading of the Gospels, through the graces we receive by the power of his sacraments.

These things are the “oil” that Jesus talks about in the Gospel today. The “oil” of our prayer; the “oil” of all our personal acts of piety and devotion; all our efforts to work with God's graces and to grow in virtue and holiness.

We need to make sure that we are like those wise virgins in the parable, that we always have enough “oil” for our lamps. We need to make sure that we are always renewing our life of faith.

We need this oil so that our lamps keep burning brightly. So that we can shine as the light of Christ into every corner of our culture and our society.^{vii}

No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket, our Lord said.^{viii} So we need to have a zeal for souls, my brothers and sisters. We need to care intensely for the salvation of others.

Moses tells us today that our love for God requires that we defend the weak. He says especially that we have to love the strangers, the foreigners who dwell in our midst.

So in this holy Mass, this celebration of all the cultures in the family of God, let us renew our promise: that this great Church of Los Angeles may always be a sign that God is near, that in his loving eyes we are all his children, and that no one is a stranger to any of us!

Our readings today also remind us that to be a child of God, a child of the light, is to be a peacemaker.^{ix}

St. Paul tells us today: As far as it depends on you, live in peace with everyone!

This is a great need in our society and culture today.

Times are tough. People are anxious about many things. And hard times can make people harder; the stress of life can make our love grow colder. We can get suspicious of other people's motives and start looking at the world as "us" versus "them." We can lose our sense of forgiveness and compassion, our feelings for the common good.

I think we can see that happening in our culture. So we have to bring the light of Christ into this darkness!

We have to teach our neighbors what St. Paul is telling us today — how to reconcile our differences without hatred; how to love our enemies; how to never seek vengeance or repay evil with evil.

I was reading this week about a woman who is being considered for sainthood. The Servant of God Rani Maria Kunju Vattalil. She was a Franciscan Clarist sister in India, from the state of Madhya Pradesh.

She served the lowest caste people, those who were denied legal rights and had no one to speak for them.

She became their friend and their advocate. They were illiterate mostly and were easily exploited by people with money, who charged them merciless, exorbitant rates of interest on loans.

Sister Rani Maria had gentle manners with everyone. She was kind even to those who were the most ruthless to the poor. She helped the people organize cooperatives to buy machinery and farm equipment. She helped them find alternative sources for credit and financing.

Her work made her enemies among the moneylenders and others who exploited the poor. They hired a man to kill her. One day in 1995, this man stabbed her to death — 51 times — while she was riding on a bus. Witnesses say she died with the name of Jesus on her lips.

I remember Sister Rani Maria this morning because she is a model of that wise virgin that Jesus calls all of us to be in his parable today.

She wrote a prayer that they found in her notebook after she died. It reads:

“Father, thank you for your love. Thank you for seeing the good in us before we see it in ourselves. Help us to believe more deeply in your unfailing mercy and teach us to be an instrument of your love and peace.”^x

This is a beautiful thought for us on this beautiful morning.

So, my brothers and sisters, let us keep our lamps trimmed and burning with the oil of prayer and strong devotion. Let us try, each of us in our own way, to be a light that scatters every darkness in our world.

And let us ask the patroness of this great Archdiocese, Our Lady of the Angels, to help us to follow her Son, who is the light of the world. May we always walk in his light and have the light of life!^{xi}

ⁱ Readings: Deut. 10:12–19; Rom. 12:9–18; Matt. 25:1–13.

ⁱⁱ Gal. 3:28; Matt. 8:11.

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 16:8; 1 Thess. 5:5; John 1:9.

^{iv} John 9:5; Matt. 5:14–16.

^v Matt. 5:14–16.

^{vi} John 12:35–36.

^{vii} Phil. 2:15–16.

^{viii} Matt. 5:15; James 2:17.

^{ix} Matt. 5:9.

^x Vincent O’Malley, *Saints of Asia* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2007), 45–47; Giuseppe Segalla, *Martyr of Charity* — Sister Rani Maria (Institute for Research in Social Sciences and Humanities, 2003).

^{xi} John 8:12.