

“Today is holy to the LORD your God. Do not be sad, and do not weep...for today is holy to our LORD. Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the LORD must be your strength!” We heard these beautiful words in the First Reading today from the Book of the Prophet Nehemiah. And these uplifting words come to us in the backdrop of so much disheartening chaos and disorder in our country, our culture, and our world—chaos and disorder that we simply cannot ignore and pretend doesn’t exist.

From the horrific terrorist attack at the Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in the southern Philippines this morning, local time, which has killed 27 people and injured 77. To our highly polarized and bitterly-divided political culture where many are so quick to judge and condemn and hateful social media mobs make it their sole aim to destroy peoples’ lives. To the recent law in NY which barbarically legalized abortion up *until birth*, removed protections for babies born alive after failed abortions, and allows *non-doctors* to perform abortions—we certainly weep for our culture, our country, and our world.

And yet in the midst of all of this evil and chaos, the Lord speaks those uplifting words to us today from the First Reading of the Book of the Prophet Nehemiah: “Today is holy to the LORD your God. Do not be sad, and do not weep...for today is holy to our LORD. Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the LORD must be your strength!” Why? Why does the Lord speak these words to us today in the midst of all the horrible things I just mentioned? What is the Lord trying to tell us through these uplifting words in the First Reading from the Book of the Prophet Nehemiah?

Brothers and sisters, in the midst of all the evil in the world, the Lord is reminding us of *where He is, right now*; where He wants to encounter us, *right now*; and what He wants to do for us and give us, *right now*! Positive, sanctifying change in our culture, our country, and our world begins with positive, *sanctifying* change in our hearts and minds that the Lord wants to start bringing *right now*. Conversion of cultures and countries begins with conversion of hearts and minds—*our own* hearts and minds!

What kind of transformation and conversion does the Lord want to effect? What does the Lord want to do for us and give us *starting today, right here, right now in this mass* so that we can go out from here and help to change our culture and our country for the better? Well the Lord tells us Himself in today's Gospel from Luke what He wants to do for us and what He wants to give us, starting *right now*.

Our Lord Jesus came “to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind—to let the oppressed go free.” In other words, our Lord Jesus came to bring hope to those who have none—to those who are mired in despair. Christ came to bring liberty to those who are enslaved and oppressed by sin and addiction. Our Lord Jesus came to give sight to the blind, especially those blinded by their hatred of others for whatever reason.

This is why the Lord exhorts us to rejoice *today*—this is why *today* is *holy to the Lord our God*, because it's *today, right now, at this mass* and at *this moment* that the Lord wants to give us the hope, the freedom, and the sight that we need to be saints—saints who go out and by the courageous witness of our lives, sanctify our culture, our country, and

our world for Christ. Saints who infuse the world with truth, goodness, and beauty.

Brothers and sisters, this is why the present is called the “present,” because it truly is a gift. I know that sounds corny, but it’s the truth—and a saving truth at that. It’s in the present moment that our Lord Jesus is knocking on the door of our heart inviting us to change—inviting us to encounter Him and embrace a new life of holiness. It’s in the present moment that Christ wants to transform our lives and heal our wounds. It’s in the present moment that the Lord is inviting us to grow in holiness, to grow in faith, hope, and love. It’s in the present moment that the Holy Spirit is inviting us to repentance and conversion of mind and heart. It’s in the present moment that we find God our merciful Father, Who loves us more than we could ever know and wants us to trust Him and abandon ourselves completely to His infinite love and goodness.

Fr. Jean-Pierre de Caussade, the Jesuit priest who wrote the spiritual classic, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, famously referred to the “Sacrament of the Present Moment.” In the words of Dr. Peter

Kreeft, Fr. Caussade called the present moment a “sacrament” because, “only the present moment can make us holy. The past cannot, because it is dead, and the future cannot, because it is not yet born. Twist and turn as you will, you cannot be, you cannot live, you cannot act...except in the present moment.” Brothers and sisters, *it’s right here, right now* in the present moment that the Lord wants to make us saints!

As we prepare to encounter our Lord and Savior in the Most Holy Eucharist, let’s respond wholeheartedly to Christ’s invitation to us *right here, right now* in the present moment to become saints, so that we won’t just weep for our world as if we’re powerless and have no hope, but we’ll lovingly seek to transform it by the courageous and humble witness of our lives.

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