

Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
on the Queenship of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary
The National Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche at Mision Nombre de Dios
August 22, 2020

Eight days after the solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady, the liturgy of the church celebrates Mary as Queen. St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross said: “May we always love, serve, and honor Mary and look to her who ‘as Queen evidences the conquering power of a serving love and of purity intact.’”

Venerable Mary of Agreda said: “The beauty, grace, and elegance of our Queen were incomparable because all her natural graces and gifts were reinforced by the splendor of divine grace and effected a marvelous union of grace and beauty in all her being and activity.”

Today is a day of joy at the National Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche, as we consecrate the first group to the Confraternity in the 21st century. As part of this installation Mass, they will commit to growing in knowledge and love for Our Lady, seeking as Our Lady asked: “Do what He tells you,” and that is glorifying the name of Jesus so that this shrine becomes truly as Pope Francis desires a “center of evangelization.” They will bring people to an encounter with the living Christ, conversion of hearts, to increase a great desire to know the Lord and live the lives of holiness.

Tonight we listen to the Gospel of the Annunciation, which we recall lovingly with the prayer of the Angelus three times a day. Mary is the first to hear: Rejoice, full of grace! The Lord is with you. The proclamation of the Gospel is always good news – it is all about joy. Witness the story of Andrew Lands’ family conversion. At times if we look at the world, we are scared and depressed, but we must turn our attention to the Gospel: It is a joy unfolding. Alegrate, it is good news. We put aside our fear, our gloom at the state of the world, and our focus is always the Word of the Lord.

The second word of the angel is be not afraid. Saint John Paul II repeated it again and again: Be not afraid. Fear is paralyzing. Fear not despite the danger of Covid-19!

Do not be afraid of the Lord’s call to serve, to a vocation, to an invitation to give or to serve. Fear not. Mary is the woman of yes. Fiat. Let it be! We are blessed that many parents come to this shrine who are not afraid of maternity – a child is always a gift. Today we hear: Let the woman choose. We say yes but always choose pro-life! How could we think that abortion could be a choice blessed by God? A child is never a problem; children are always a gift, and the people of God are always ready to support and enable pregnancy. Mary’s yes is a joyful yes for all life.

Pope Francis often talks about Mary’s gaze. People come to the shrine, and they like to look, to gaze at the image of Our Lady of La Leche – a loving gaze at such beauty: mother and child. The child son of God and son of Mary! Mary, as the mother of the incarnate Word. Gazing at Our Lady of La Leche gives us delight, pure delight. But she also looks with love at her Child,

the Savior of humankind. And she looks at us with love, and that is such a gift, to experience her love for me – for us.

Let us tonight experience great gratitude for the presence of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception, for Fathers Erlin, Julio, and Carlos. For the presence of the Servants of the Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Sister Christine, and the dedicated personnel of the shrine guided by Jon Carres, for the wonderful benefactors who sustain the shrine, and for the selfless volunteers.

This is a shrine with an amazing history dating back to 1565 with the celebration of a Mass founding the City of St. Augustine. The Great Cross reminds us of the first consecration of the State of Florida to our Redeemer. It is a site where the Martyrs of La Florida have left their blood, stating God is first above all things. Today, we are so grateful for the generous stewardship of the first group of the Confraternity of the 21st century and for the others that will join them in the future both here and at the Sante Fe Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche at St. Madeline Sofie Parish in the western deanery of Gainesville. Rejoice Mary, be not afraid Mary, nothing is impossible to God!

St. Maximilian Kolbe wrote a prayer that St. John Paul II prayed daily. It is fitting for us to remember it today in honor of our Queen of Heaven, our Queen of Peace, our Queen of the Apostles:

Mary my mother; Live in me, Act in me, speak in me and through me, think your thoughts in my mind, love through my heart, give me your dispositions and feelings, teach, lead me and guide me to Jesus, correct, enlighten and expand my thoughts and behavior, possess my soul, take over my entire personality and life, replace it with Yourself, incline me to constant adoration, pray in me and through me, let me live in you and keep me in this union always. Amen.

Totus Tuus!