



ST. JOAN OF ARC

Veneration of her Ring

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, May 6th, 2023)

Right Reverend Fathers,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

THE APOSTOLIC ZEAL of both our Archbishop and our parish priest has obtained that we might receive Joan of Arc's ring, thus honouring her who bore it. The word "relic" comes from the Latin word *relinquere*, which means "to leave, to relinquish." Relics are what a martyr or a saint has left us: the remainders of his body, and more broadly, fragments of the garments he wore, or objects he used. Venerating in truth these relics means honouring the person of the saint. Above all, it bears witness to the will to take his life as an example. Last, it means giving thanks to God, the author of all holiness.

Benedict XVI has taught:

God is our Father, for Him we are not anonymous, impersonal beings but have a name. And a phrase in the Psalms always moves me when I pray. "Thy hands have made and fashioned me,"[†] says the Psalmist. In this beautiful image each one of us can express his personal relationship with God. "Thy hands have fashioned me. Thou hast thought of me, and created and wanted me."^a

† Ps 119 [118]:73.

a. BENEDICT XVI,
Audience,
May 23rd, 2012.

We may well say words of thanksgiving. Are we aware of that? We may say them as regards ourselves, our neighbour, and

most especially as we contemplate the holiness at work in persons designated by the Church to our veneration. In the light of God, in the heat of His grace, humanities that are similar to our own poor and frail humanities, shine, grow younger, radiate on the history of the Church, of a country, a city, on others' lives.

If the world, if the hearts of men, are so sad, wouldn't it be because some day, yesterday, today, man would have forgotten to say "Thank you," to give thanks? Would the fact that he forgets to be fecund have led him to an everlasting barrenness? Would he no longer dare radiate the gift of God, which grace is? Before being the place where evil abounds, the world is first and foremost the place where the grace of God abounds even more, the place of hope.

Let us allow ourselves to be led by St. Joan of Arc. She died in 1431 at the age of barely 19. Her mission was a flash of lightning on a dark century. Joan is the living proof that it is not the times that make saints, but truly the saints that set the times ablaze.

When she was born, in 1412, the Church was rent asunder: one pope, two antipopes. Europe was wounded by the scourge of wars. The most dramatic of these wars will be called the Hundred Years' War, an endless guerilla between two dynasties, accompanied by looting.

In times of extreme turmoil, God leads Joan on the quiet path of abandonment and trust. "Thy hands have fashioned me. Thou hast thought of me, and created and wanted me." What an astonishing choice! From the most remote ends of France, from the tiny hamlet of Domremy, God draws a young maiden, who can neither read nor write, and makes of her the supreme commander. Assuredly, Joan has received a Christian education. She loves sincerely Jesus and Mary. Her charity is acknowledged by all. Yet, is that enough to set a nation free?

God prepares her for her mission by developing in her, as she is still but a child, an outstanding mystical life, under the guidance of Archangel St. Michael. The call to commit herself personally to the liberation of her country resounds in her heart.

Mystical life, mission: there is more. Joan pronounces the vow of virginity, consecrating her person exclusively to the love of Jesus. She will then draw her strength from the sacraments of Eucharist and penance, from long moments of silent prayer, of

dialogue with her Lord before the Crucifix, and also with Mary. She will draw her strength from a *Fiat* to the will of God: *Fiat* for glory, *Fiat* for the cross.

Joan's action was fecund. A defeated and disheartened people regained hope. A king was crowned. The mere witness of the life of "the Maid", namely, the virgin, carried out a true mission of evangelisation.

A war-leader, Joan nonetheless remained a peacemaker, a peace she offered to the King of England and his men.

After one year of intense action, Joan was captured by a Burgundy squire, and sold to the English. Now was beginning for her the time of Passion. Condemned by Frenchmen, judged by a tribunal in the pay of the theologians of the University of Paris, what will remain of her?

She was burned at the stake on May 30th, in Old Market Square in Rouen. Her ashes were thrown into the River Seine, along with her heart, which, to the frightened amazement of her executioners, blazing flames were powerless to consume.

What remains of Joan is a message, and this message is symbolised by her ring, the witness of her unshakeable union to God, to Jesus, to Mary, the witness of an unalloyed faithfulness.

Shortly before she dies, Joan asks one of the priests to hold before the stake a procession cross. She wants to die with her eyes gazing at the Crucified One, or more exactly, by allowing His eyes to gaze at her. As she dies, she pronounces several times the Name of Jesus, or more exactly, she allows the Spirit to pronounce this Name in her.

Joan is still fecund today. It is often said with a hint of irony that "the habit does not make the monk." More than anyone, monks are in a good position to know just how true that is. A few seconds, and very little energy, suffice to don a monastic habit. Many sufferings, much self-sacrifice, much charity, are necessary to stand before God day after day during a year, ten years, fifty years, a whole lifetime, and to behave as a true monk with each of one's brothers.

What makes the greatness of a man is not so much what he does, as what he is, and his communion with God. Joan reveals the consistence of her life throughout the most dreadful of trials and temptations. She has known both glory and disgrace, she

was forgotten by the very ones she had so faithfully served, and first of all by the King whom she had had anointed and crowned. Such different “appearances” did not affect her being. Action and communion are but one. God remained faithful to Joan, and Joan to God.

The life of Joan, in the image of Christ’s life, bears witness to the fact that on this earth, smallness and greatness rub shoulders. Smallness is not necessarily where it seems to be, nor is true greatness in what shines.

I praise thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was Thy gracious will.^a

a. *Lk 10:21.*

May Joan teach us, in the school of the newborn, who know but one fight, her motto: “My Liege Lord God, first served.”

Amen, Alleluia.

