

July and August are packed with feasts and memorials of saints – another reason to like summer! Three of these saints that I would like to touch on, are: St Peter Chrysologus, St Ignatius of Loyola, and St Alphonsus Ligouri.

St Peter Chrysologus (“Chrysologus” means ‘golden word’), Father and Doctor of the Church, was born around 380 and died around 450. Thus he overlapped with the great St Augustine. These were tumultuous times as the Roman Empire was beginning to crumble. The Lord thus raised up what was needed for that time, which became a gift to all later ages as well. St Peter Chrysologus was made Archbishop of Ravenna in northern Italy. In fact, the Church recently celebrated the memorial of another saint who was made Bishop of Ravenna by St Peter the Apostle himself – St Apollinaris, who was also a martyr. As Tertullian said: the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians. Coming back now to St Peter Chrysologus, he was known for his great preaching and teaching, hence the moniker (or nickname) of Chrysologus. There were 2 big heresies (false teachings) that were prevalent during St. Peter’s life – both about the person of Christ; one denied the humanity of Christ and the other denied His divinity and thus Mary’s title of “Mother of God.” A lot of St. Peter Chrysologus’ teaching, then, centered on Mary, the Incarnation, and the person of Jesus.

Nestorius, who was sadly a bishop, is the one who said Mary could not be called the Mother of God, thus denying the Divinity of Christ. In St Peter’s time there was much debate, even amongst the lay faithful about this question. First of all, imagine that – people talking seriously about serious matters of faith. Today, it seems, discussions about the faith don’t get much farther than complaining about the priest! As legitimate as that may be, maybe it wouldn’t hurt to dive a little deeper once in a while. In any event, there was talk, talk, talk. Then, the Church declared the *dogma* that Mary is the Mother of God, which goes to the identity of Jesus; if Mary did not give birth to one person who was/is both God and man, then we’re not redeemed. But here is the point that I want to come to. After the dogma was solemnly promulgated, St Peter said to his people: the debate is over, the Church has spoken. In other words, the issue is definitively, beyond question, settled; the debate is over because the Church has spoken definitively. In other words, St Peter Chrysologus is bringing out the teaching authority of the Church and it’s great value for us.

In one of his homilies, Chrysologus was speaking about how the Incarnation dignified man. He went on to say: “Why then, man, are you so worthless in your own eyes and yet so precious in God’s eyes?” This is not, of course, an exhortation to foolish pride, which also makes a person small since it makes an idol out of one’s own self – a puny god. This is rather a call to a great work. These golden words of St. Peter Chrysologus are an inspiration to lay hold of that Kingdom of unsurpassed glory for which we are meant, regardless of any sacrifice needed; to become a son or daughter in my Father’s Kingdom, the greatest of all things. Stand up and become what you are meant to be! How to proceed? Let us turn our attention to the other two saints, which can help, at least in part, to answer that question.

St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus (called Jesuits for short), lived in the 1500’s. St Ignatius did not start out as *Saint* Ignatius. As a young man, Ignatius was a soldier and only dreamt of obtaining damsels and worldly glory through battle. But then his leg was seriously injured in a battle and he was laid up convalescing for a long period of time. He asked for some books to read, since their internet and cable were out! He wanted some worldly romantic type books to fuel his imagination but they didn’t have any so instead they gave him books on the life of Christ and some saints. Ignatius became very engrossed in these and they eventually led him to a great conversion.

Notice a few things about his conversion. First, he was already Catholic (as were most Spaniards, and indeed most Europeans at that time) so this was an interior conversion). What conversion means here is that, although he was undoubtedly going to Mass, etc, he was dominated by worldly desires and ambitions; the Lord was by no means first and foremost on his mind. Conversion, then means this flipped around. It is something we are called to. Notice also that this conversion would not have happened if it had not been for a setback; he had to stop, or more to the point, he had to be stopped. His plans had to be impeded so that God’s plan, for Ignatius’ *eternal* glory, could be brought about. How often this is true in everyone’s life; try to begin to recognize every

trial and tribulation as our Lord knocking on the door, as an opportunity to draw closer to Him. Another thing to notice is that reading good Catholic writings, combined with *thinking about them*, is what led to his newfound enthusiasm for our Lord. Lives and writings of the saints and other good teachers of the faith – find them, read them, and ponder them.

Like many Catholics today, then, Ignatius went to Mass but that was about it. Then he went through this initial conversion so he was on the path...*but*, he still had a long ways to go. He was filled with zeal for our Lord and the faith (which is good) but he still had to go further. This is something that is so easy to forget: there is a *progression* in the interior life, there is a growth in virtue, a growth in knowledge, love, and likeness of our Lord that continues throughout our lives; we don't just arrive and we're done. For those who do enter this first stage of conversion, it is very tempting to think that's it, I have the Lord now, and from there it is easy to fall into what is often called spiritual pride. If that happens, the person goes backwards without even realizing it. Another great saint from this time period – St John of the Cross, Doctor of the Church – warned against this as well. Another characteristic of this initial conversion, exhibited by Ignatius, is contrition for all the sins of his life; this is always the first step in the spiritual life; it can't be skipped. Finally, St Ignatius suffered many trials and hardships throughout the rest of his life – *after* becoming a true follower of our Lord. If the tempter sees someone entering into conversion (leaving him and drawing closer to the Lord), a very common temptation is to suggest that if God was really good and if you were really on the right path, you shouldn't be having all this difficulty – there should be no cross. The lives of the saints repeatedly bear out that this is a blatant lie. Don't be drawn into it. The life of St Ignatius, then, brings out a good number of basics regarding our approach to the Lord. St Alphonsus will give us some more specific instruction.

St. Alphonsus Ligouri was an Italian bishop in the 1700's. He is known mainly as the father of moral theology. St. Alphonsus placed a great emphasis on prayer: he who prays much, he said, has a good chance of being saved, he who prays little has little chance, and he who does not pray is damned, said this Doctor of the Church. All sincere, thoughtful prayer is of great value but there is one form of prayer, one devotion, that St. Alphonsus insisted on above all others: "Certainly, amongst all devotions," he said, "...that of adoring Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament takes the first place, is the most pleasing to God, and the most useful to ourselves." He is advocating spending time before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass. Now think for a moment about the book of Exodus telling about Moses assembling the Ark of the Covenant – a magnificently decorated chest that contained the stone tablets with the commandments, the rod of Aaron (Moses' brother) that was used as a miraculous sign to the Egyptians, and some manna. Imagine if the Ark were found today and you could go see not only it but its contents as well – the actual stone tablets with the commandments on them, Aaron's rod, and the manna still intact. It would be stunning. A person might not even dare to touch it because of its sacredness. It would be right to be stunned by it and to have a fear of even touching it, and yet...we have something that is *infinitely* more sacred, more valuable, and more powerful than that – the actual person of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. The manna in the desert was a prefigurement of something far greater to come, namely the Holy Eucharist. Pray and ask the Lord to open our minds and increase our awareness of His presence in the Eucharist, to increase our devotion, reverence, awe, and appreciation for it. Please ask this for yourself, your family, your parishes, and your pastor. There is no greater work that you can do. "Ask and you will receive" – He who made that promise *cannot* be unfaithful. Why not do it? Why not be a part of this great work? No harm can come from it, only good – greater good than we can imagine and in ways that we cannot come close to anticipating.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn