

PASTOR'S CORNER

Theodicy and Our Lady of the Rosary

The article which is reproduced below is from the pen of Fr. George Rutler, a parish Priest from the Archdiocese of New York, whom I have quoted before. It appeared in his parish bulletin published October 2 2016. In it, Fr. Rutler aptly describes the prevailing belief that through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ottoman Muslim forces were defeated at the naval battle of Lepanto in 1571, thus preserving Christendom (and allowing for our own culture). I will have a few comments to make following his words.

Our faith is based, not on abstract speculation, but on historical events. Christ does not hover around us as a philosophical idea, for he “was made flesh and dwelt among us.” The Church’s feasts are acts of thanksgiving for actions of God that have affected the course of human existence. On October 7, the Church celebrates the victory of Christian naval vessels over those of the Ottoman Muslims who outnumbered the Christians by more than two to one, and whose ships were manned by upwards of fifteen thousand Christian galley slaves.

The Battle of Lepanto in 1571 was the greatest naval engagement until the Battle of Jutland in World War I, but it is not commemorated just as a lesson in the art of maritime war. The core of the feast is that it saved Christian civilization. Compared to it, July 4 and Waterloo and Gettysburg and D-Day are ancillary struggles to preserve what would not exist at all, had it not been for 1571. Pope St. Pius V, by divine inspiration while praying the Rosary, announced in the Church of Santa Sabina that a triumph of the Cross had been won, at the very moment the battle was won in the Gulf of Patras in western Greece, though news of it would have taken many days to reach Rome by courier.

We revere the “Star Spangled Banner” whose broad stripes and bright stars gallantly streamed in 1814, but quite more remarkable was the banner held by Gianandrea Doria, great-nephew of the Admiral Andrea Doria, at Lepanto. It bore the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Lady had appeared in Mexico forty years earlier, but reproductions of the image had made it to old Europe, and King Philip of Spain had given one to the fleet. It has been preserved in the cathedral of Genoa.

Had the battle ended differently, Sultan Selim could have fulfilled his vow to conquer Rome, turning the basilica of Saint Peter into a mosque, despoiling and upending its bells so that they might be filled with oil and burned in honor of Allah, as had been done in 997 at the tomb of Saint James in Compostela.

Is all this the dilettantish indulgence of the sort of people who watch the History Channel? We would not be here – nor would our holy religion, our universities, our science, our democracy, our enfranchised women, our justice, our social tolerance, and our entire moral fabric – were it not for Lepanto. The feast of its victory was instituted by Pope St. Pius V and, after the final defeat of the Ottomans in 1716 at Timișoara in present-day Romania, led by Prince Eugene of Savoy, Pope Clement XI made it a universal feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. Given the terrors of our present times, it would be well to pray the Rosary on October 7.

God’s action in history goes by the name of ‘providence.’ Trying to understand it, at least in part, is the purview of theodicy. God acts in particulars, not in ideals, abstractions or generalities. God acts therefore in human history, but without necessarily causing particular events to occur. To be sure, God does not hate Muslims or wish their death or destruction. But he does know, for He is its foundation, that the Christian faith is the fullest and most complete expression of truth and goodness of which human beings are capable. Although I think it would be somewhat crass to ever presume that ‘God fights on our side’, He certainly works through us to oppose evil, darkness, and error wherever they may appear. Our Lady did not win the battle of Lepanto, nor did praying the Rosary guarantee the result. But both affected the playing out of the complexity of human history, in which God can never be said to be a disinterested bystander.

It is sobering to realize that today almost 450 years later with Christendom but a faint dream in Europe, that we are now in so many ways attempting to undo the gains made then. Islam is gaining a foothold in Europe today that would have been considered unimaginable but 70 years ago when the Second World War ended. The blame is our own. The Muslims are vibrant and their families are large and devout. Are we? Do we practice our faith with vibrancy and zeal? Mosques are often packed for worship. Church's in Europe are all but empty, Sunday after Sunday. In the U.S., it isn't much better. And it's getting worse.

A Christianity that is moribund and lukewarm in practice is a faith which is dying (at least in practice). Of course, the Catholic Church can never die, for its heart is the Spirit himself and its Head is Christ himself. But its earthly body (which is made up of human souls) can atrophy. The practice of the faith can be abandoned by humans all over the world, for each of us has been granted free will (for which we are completely accountable). We faced a similar prospect of such a disaster in 1571 at a time when Christianity was in turmoil. We face a similar prospect today. Liberal secular humanism cannot survive, neither in Europe or here. Such a distorted view of existence will die off quickly, for its adherents are mired in self-absorption. If a revived Christianity is off the stage when the demise of our current narcissistic society occurs, however, there are other religious actors, now just off stage, waiting to rush front and center and take their bows.

Pray the Rosary this weekend for an awakening of the Christian faith. I know I will.

Fr. Stephen Geer

Ordinary Time

Day	Date	Time	Observance	Mass Intention
VIGIL	Oct 7	5:00 pm	Vigil of the Sunday Mass	Joanna Kong +
SUNDAY	Oct 8	9:00 am	The Most Holy Eucharist of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ	Ted Sofranko +
		11:30 am	The Most Holy Eucharist of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ	Missa pro populo
Monday	Oct 9		No service	
Tuesday	Oct 10	8:30 am	Ferial weekday	Marlene Muma
Wednesday	Oct 11	8:30 am	St. John XXIII, Pope	Asiana Bui
Thursday	Oct 12	10:00 am	School Mass (Ferial weekday)	Tricia Christensen
Friday	Oct 13	8:30 am	Ferial weekday	Cara Christensen
Saturday	Oct 14	8:30 am	St. Callistus I, Pope & Martyr	Gene Durrin +
			<u>Readings for the Sunday Mass:</u> Isaiah 25.6-10a; Psalm 23; Philippians 4.12-14, 19-20; Matthew 22.1-14	
VIGIL		5:00 pm	Vigil of the Sunday Mass	Joanna Kong +
SUNDAY	Oct 15	9:00 am	The Most Holy Eucharist of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ	Henry Chieu Nguyen +
		11:30 am	The Most Holy Eucharist of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ	Missa pro populo