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Imitating the Manly Faith and Courage of the North American Martyrs

- Introduction
 - Thanks. Great to be with you in this sacred spot to ask God to strengthen us in our vocation to be men of God, men of the Church, solid family men, men who strengthen our culture and country, good men and holy men.
 - I'm often asked what is the greatest challenge facing the Church in this country.
 - Some say the crisis of vocations to the Sacrament of Marriage, to the Priesthood, to religious life.
 - Some say it's remedying the consequences of the clergy sexual abuse crisis and the damage to the Church's credibility when, rather than dying to protect the Church's lambs, some in the Church attacked them like wolves and many others didn't respond with the type of righteous anger, fatherly love, and hatred of evil that everyone rightfully expected.
 - Others say it's a crisis of faith, seen in decreased numbers of faith practice, Mass attendance, and so many other indicators.
 - But I think it's really a crisis of courage, which is behind the other ones I've just named not to mention many other problems that plague the Church. People lack the courage to make lifetime commitments. Leaders in the Church lacked the courage to confront head on the plague of priests cheating on their vocation and what that might mean to the Church's reputation, bank accounts, and morale. And even when people know the faith, there's a softness, timidity, even shame to live by it, because they know they may suffer as a result of it at work or school, among family members or friends.
 - One area in which we see it is with regard to religious freedom.
 - We're living in an age in which popular culture routinely mocks Christian teaching and attacks Christians. We're treated as bigots for upholding Christ's teaching on marriage, as misogynists for defending the sanctity of every life, as traitors for treating immigrants the way we would treat Christ. We're being sued for not baking cakes or renting halls or compromising our consciences in favor of the culturally-correct *zeitgeist*.
 - For example, when Jews face anti-Semitism and Muslims confront Islamophobia, they respond vigorously and marshal the public to get involved, whereas Catholics, despite our greater numbers, largely let bigots get away with it. Anti-Catholicism is the last acceptable prejudice because Catholics tolerate it. We permit it not because we're "turning the other cheek" — by which Jesus instructed us not to play the victim but rather to defend our dignity without vengeance! — but because we often don't have the resolve to stand united against the cultural bullies.
 - The lack of courage happens not just in terms religious freedom concerns, but also in terms of the call to defend the truth and share the faith. Many Catholics are cowed before the elites who are forcing their values revolution

on everyone else. Rather than witnessing to Christ and the faith, many Catholics, to echo Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston's quip, seem to have entered a witness protection program.

- Inside the Church we see a similar faint-heartedness with regard to confronting all types of conspicuous problems. One of the big issues in priestly (and episcopal) leadership is conflict aversion. Pastoral problems are often ducked rather than addressed. Neuralgic and unpopular teachings are neglected rather than named. For many, not hurting another's feelings or offending another's sensibilities, rather than communicating charity in truth, is the operative moral praxis and leadership style. We see it with regard to the weakness in confronting clergy who violate their sacred promises and live a double life, parishes and schools that no longer come close to paying their bills, Catholic politicians who betray God and their faith to win elections, faithful who require fraternal correction with regard to practices that everyone knows are immoral. As a result the problems worsen like a cancer in the Mystical Body.
- And lest we engage in noticing the speck in our brothers' eyes but fail to notice the logs in our own, we have to admit that, at a personal level, many of us are wimpish in the fight against sin and persevering effort to love and grow in holiness.
- Our fears ultimately go straight back to the Fall and impact so many areas of our life.
 - As toddlers, many of us fear monsters and the dark, thunder and lightning, strangers, doctors, dentists, and dogs.
 - As we grow, other fears take their place. We fear snakes, roaches, rats and bats. We worry about failing ourselves and others. We're phobic about public speaking. We dread loneliness, not being liked or having friends, having relationships break down or never form in the first place.
 - We fear betrayal, humiliation, rejection, or irrelevance. We're scared of getting fired, of financial collapse, of poverty and misery. We fear being judged or falsely accused. In some places, we fear various types of suffering we might undergo as a result of giving witness to the truth, including, in some places, imprisonment, torture and death.
 - We fear losing control, becoming debilitated, or losing our mind. We fear missing out, not seeing the world and at the end of our life, looking back with regret that we had placed the ladder of success against the wrong wall.
 - We fear something terrible happening to someone we love.
 - We ultimately fear suffering, death, the possibility that hell is real and that, in our weakness, we might indirectly choose it.
 - These fears and others devour our souls and psyches. Many of us are neutralized, short-circuited, by these fears.
- That's why the recent popes have worked very hard to help us to confront our fears.
 - St. John Paul II, in his inaugural homily that began his papacy, addressed it, thundering famously in St. Peter's Square October 22, 1978: *Non abbiate paura!* He saw that fear was eating man alive. He saw that so many demagogues were exploiting that fear. He saw that the Church was weak because of fear, and so he said: "Brothers and Sisters, do not be afraid to welcome Christ and accept his power. ... Do not be afraid. Open wide the

doors for Christ. ... Do not be afraid. Christ knows 'what is in man.' He alone knows it. So often today man does not know what is within him, in the depths of his mind and heart. So often he is uncertain about the meaning of his life on this earth. He is assailed by doubt, a doubt that turns into despair. We ask you therefore, we beg you with humility and trust, let Christ speak to man. He alone has words of life, yes, of eternal life."

- Pope Benedict returned to the theme of fear in his own inaugural homily in 2005, because the problem had not disappeared. He developed John Paul II's thought.
 - "My mind goes back to 22 October 1978, when Pope John Paul II began his ministry here in Saint Peter's Square. His words on that occasion constantly echo in my ears: 'Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors for Christ!' The Pope was addressing the mighty, the powerful of this world, who feared that Christ might take away something of their power if they were to let him in, if they were to allow the faith to be free. ... [But] the Pope was also speaking to everyone, especially the young. Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom? And once again the Pope said: No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation. And so, today, with great strength and great conviction, on the basis of long personal experience of life, I say to you, dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life. Amen.
- Pope Francis similarly has been speaking like a broken record about "**parrhesia**," the boldness that comes from the Holy Spirit, with which we're called to speak up, to persevere, to love and, as he likes to say, to get "dirty" in caring for others.
- All of these points are reading the same signs of the times and recognize that the crucial need for courage continues unabated.
- We're not living the Gospel, we're not living as men of God, unless we're living with courage. Cowardice is antithetical to Christian faith and life.
 - One of the most common phrases in Sacred Scripture is "Be not afraid!" It appears 104 times in the Old Testament, 44 times in the New. Against our fears, God insistently tells us to take courage.
 - Jesus tells us not to be afraid of his call (Lk 5:10), of drowning at sea (Mt 8:26), of wars and insurrections (Lk 21:9), of the death of loved ones (Lk 8:50), of those who can only kill the body but can't harm the soul (Mt 10:28), or of what will happen to him in his Passion (Jn 14:1).
 - To believe in him, to trust in his accompaniment, to have faith in his victory over suffering and death, he suggests, is to be filled with courage. Courage is not the

absence of fear, but the capacity to do what we ought despite our fear — because of the strength that we receive from God.

- That's why it's so important for us to be here at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Martyrs, because we can learn so much about courage from the four saints associated with this sacred spot.
 - This is the site of the martyrdom of three of the eight North American Martyrs, Saints Isaac Jogues, Rene Goupil and Jean de Lalande and the birthplace of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha.
 - If one can't help becoming more Marian visiting Guadalupe, Lourdes and Fatima or more Eucharistic at Lanciano or Orvieto, one also can't help growing in holy audacity here, as we pray, as we traverse the sacred spots fertilized by their blood, like the ravine, as ponder the faith and love that made them dauntless until the end, as we convene in this place fittingly called the "Colosseum" after the Flavian Amphitheater in Rome where so many early Christian martyrs proved that they had more valor than the greatest gladiators.
 - It was here in this place that Saints Isaac and Rene needed to run the gauntlet, as people beat them with clubs. It was here that Saint Isaac had his fingers cut off at the bone. It was here that they were tomahawked, where St. Rene's body was dragged into the ravine and later the bodies of Saints Isaac and Jean were tossed into the Mohawk river.
 - The blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians. Ten years after their martyrdom, St. Kateri Tekakwitha was born in this village of Ossernenon. When she was 20, after the Mohawks had moved the village a few miles down the Mohawk River, she asked the new wave of Jesuits who had come to her village for instruction in prayer and baptism. Normally candidates for baptism needed to wait two years, to test their faith to ensure they would keep it despite the many hardships it might bring, including martyrdom. After one month, however, her faith was recognized as strong and mature enough to endure. Her sufferings on account of her baptism— from her uncle, from her fellow residents, even from the children — would become so acute that the Jesuits, to save her life, arranged for her escape to their mission south of Montreal, where she would spend the next and last three years of her life dedicated to prayer and to charity even in the most brutal wintry conditions. She is a simple, approachable, contagious example of the courage that loves God with all one's mind, heart, soul and strength, without counting the costs.
 - Our pilgrimage here — to the place of St. Kateri's humble birth and SS. Isaac's, Rene's and Jean's glorious birth into eternity — helps us breath the air of audacity and bolster us with the courage needed to remain faithful on the pilgrimage of life.
- Practical things we need to do to grow in courage.
 - Faith
 - The first habit needed is faith, to recognize that Christ, who promised to be with us always until the end of time (Mt 28:20), is good to his word.
 - Faith has made so many strong. We can think about Eleazar and the mother of the Seven Sons in the Second Book of Maccabees. We can think about the faith of the Syro-Phoenician woman and of the Centurion whose son was at the point of death.
 - Faith likewise helps us trust in God's providential care. There's a temptation, especially in times of crisis, to try to take control even over things that

human beings cannot control. This can come from a practical atheism, from living as if God doesn't exist or doesn't care. Faith inspires us to do all we can, but in tandem, rather than apart, from God, knowing that our life is in God's hands.

- We see the conversion of faith in the first apostles, because they saw Christ risen. These same men who abandoned Christ on Holy Thursday out of fear would eventually give fearless testimony before the same Sanhedrin who had had Jesus crucified. They knew that if Christ rose from the dead on the third day that not even crucifixion would keep them down.
- We need to have a similar faith!
- Docility to, and cooperation with, the Holy Spirit
 - On Holy Thursday, the apostles left the Upper Room and cowardly betrayed the Lord. 53 days later, filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, they left and boldly announced the Gospel.
 - They show us that the Holy Spirit can convert apostates into apostles.
 - They show us what parrhesia looks like.
 - This Gift of Fortitude that made them and the martyrs strong will make us strong.
- Prayer
 - Prayer is faith in action.
 - The more we turn to God, the more we recognize in every circumstance that he who triumphed over both sin and death is with us, strengthening us.
 - As St. Paul wrote in his Letter to the Romans, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him? ... What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? ... No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."
 - Prayer helps us to have this confidence.
 - Prayer also nourishes us in our divine filiation. Jesus spoke about this in St. Matthew's Gospel when he said:
 - Matt. 10:26-33. "Therefore do not be afraid of them. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, **be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.** Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

- Correlatively, we also need courage to win the “battle of prayer,” to overcome the typical struggles to prioritize prayer, to fight against discouragement, dryness, distractions, acedia, fatigue and other obstacles.
 - Asceticism
 - Comfort-seeking weakens us.
 - It’s the opposite of working out.
 - In an age of affirmation and of the consumerist, quasi-religious pursuit of the maximization of pleasure, self-denial and picking up our Cross each day to follow Christ seem almost insane. A healthy but vigorous asceticism is one of the things very much needed today in the clergy and Catholic people in general.
 - Many do not moderate their appetites for food and sweets at all and their waistlines, sugar and cholesterol numbers show it. Others drink too much, smoke, and can’t discipline their addictions to television, the internet or social media. Others can’t conquer their anger.
 - Courage is needed to train ourselves through mortification to say yes to God and no to the concupiscence of the eyes, flesh and pride of life.
 - Acts of Courage
 - Like any virtue, we form the habit by repeated acts.
 - When we pray for courage, God always responds by giving us his grace, but he also gives us opportunities to exercise our moral muscles, so that we might learn how to do what we ought despite human fears. And God gives us plenty of opportunity to exercise courage
 - Courage is, strictly speaking, not the absence of fear, but doing what we ought to do despite our fear because of the strength that we receive from Christ.
 - Speaking up, speaking the truth, going outside other comfort zones, etc., helps it to become easier the next time.
 - We need to be willing to be the first, to be alone. If we constantly wait for others, we’re giving into the habit of cowardice.
 - Charity
 - Charity helps us to sacrifice ourselves for the good of others.
 - “No one has greater love,” Jesus said during the Last Supper, “to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13), and charity motivates us to take risks, even dangerous ones, to protect and provide for those we love.
 - Moms and Dads, even the most temperamentally timid and conflict adverse, instinctively protect their children in the face of gunmen, bombs, and tornados.
 - The greater the love, the greater the audacity.
 - Courage, as just mentioned, does not mean fearlessness, but doing what we ought despite our fear, and love gives us the strength to overcome fear and do what love demands.
 - Surrounding ourselves with courageous people
 - We see this in the military
 - We see this in the original Jesuits
 - We become like our friends.

- If we surround ourselves by the pusillanimous we will become weaker. If we surround ourselves by those who are strong, we become stronger.
 - Pondering the martyrs
 - The Church in every age is meant to be at a spiritual level what a marine boot camp is meant to do militarily: to train people to persevere courageously. But where can Catholics go to grow in courage? Where can we learn how to remain faithful despite our fears? Who can be our soul's drill instructors?
 - In the early Church, the faithful would regularly visit the tombs of the martyrs. During the age of persecution, they did it to beg their intercession, so that they would remain faithful under trial. After the persecutions ceased, they did so, so that they might have live the Christian life with heroic faith, hope and love.
 - It's possible for us to follow in their footsteps and go to the tombs of Peter, Paul, Agnes, Cecilia, Lawrence and others in Rome, of Lucy in Syracuse, Agatha in Catania, and so many others. But we have an extraordinary shrine close to home that we should all take more seriously.
 - There's no better place in the United States to be formed in courage than here.
 - Chastity
 - Perhaps the biggest addiction of our age, the biggest weakness, is to lust. We see that in the extraordinary profits that flow from pornography, which dwarfs in annual revenue everything earned by all of the major sports leagues. We see it in how we can't eliminate the demand for prostitution, even for human trafficking victims.
 - But we need more here than the courage to be continent, which is to abstain from sexual sin. We need the courage to love God with all our mind, heart, soul and strength, and to love our neighbor not just a little, or even a lot, but in the self-sacrificial way to the extreme with which Jesus loved us. The virtue that helps us to love this way is chastity.
 - Speaking about the virgin martyrs, St. Ambrose in the fourth century said, "Virginity is praiseworthy not because it is found in martyrs, but because it makes martyrs."
 - The strength required to say a yes of love to Christ and a no to the desire for marriage and family is something that fortifies a person to stay faithful out of love to Christ at the supreme hour. This is what we see in Saints Agnes, Barbara, Agatha, Cecilia, Maria Goretti and so many others.
 - This is the chastity that also strengthened Jamie Schmidt of House Springs, Missouri, the 53 year-old mother of three who was gunned down at a Catholic Supply store in November 2019 for refusing to strip naked and perform a sex act on a gunman who had pressured two other women in the store to do so.
 - Just as St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that God's will is our holiness and "therefore avoid all porneia" or unchastity, because unchastity shortcircuits the pursuit of holiness, so it also enervates courage.
 - We'll never be courageous men if we're lustful takers rather than bold and unselfish self-givers.
 - Looking at God rather than the problems

They'll come and simply say that they commit ordinary sins like everyone else without much compunction. Others out of wounded pride will wallow in self-pity, not believing that they were capable of doing what they did, and shutting themselves off from God. They too embarrassed or ashamed to admit what they've done. Others are mortified to come to take advantage of the way Jesus set up the Sacrament of Confession on Easter Sunday night through ministers to whom he gave the Holy Spirit to forgive and retain sins in his name, whom he sent out to forgive sins just as the Father sent him as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. They'll use many excuses, but most are simply afraid to admit to another, even one who would die before revealing someone else's least venial sin, what they've done, as if he would say "You did *what?*" rather than admire them for their humility and sincerity. We need courage.

- We can all draw courage from the Parable of the Prodigal Son. We can examine it under many angles, but one is about the courage it took to return home. He came to his senses about the goodness of his father and he started the journey. Covered. He never expected what the Father would do. The other son didn't have that courage. Didn't recognize. He was representing the scribes and the Pharisees, those who separated themselves from sinners, those who thought they were righteous, that they didn't need a doctor. What will it be for us?
- Proper celebration of the Mass
 - We enter into communion with Christ and his courage at Mass.
 - In this time of Eucharistic Revival, it's so important for us to grasp what is meant to happen in us at Mass.
 - In the Eucharist, Jesus wishes to tell us, no matter what storms we're facing, "Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid."
 - He makes himself present in our world precisely to give us that strength.
 - It is the strength of the martyrs. I've always been very moved by the Eucharistic courage of the martyrs of Abitene.
 - In 304, the Emperor Diocletian forbade Christians, on pain of death, from possessing the Scriptures, from gathering on Sundays to celebrate the Eucharist and from building places in which to hold their assemblies.
 - In Abitene, a small village in present-day Tunisia, 49 Christians were taken by surprise one Sunday while they were celebrating the Eucharist, gathered in the house of Octavius Felix, thereby defying the imperial prohibitions. They were arrested and taken to Carthage to be interrogated by the Proconsul Anulinus.
 - Significant among other things is the answer a certain Emeritus gave to the Proconsul who asked him why on earth they had disobeyed the Emperor's severe orders. He replied: "*Sine dominico non possumus*": that is, we cannot live without joining together on Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist. We would lack the strength to face our daily problems and not to succumb.

- After atrocious tortures, these 49 martyrs of Abitene were killed. Thus, they confirmed their faith with bloodshed. They died, but they were victorious.
 - Pope Benedict said in 2005: “The experience of the martyrs of Abitene is also one on which we 21st-century Christians should reflect. It is not easy for us either to live as Christians, even if we are spared such prohibitions from the emperor.”
 - But these martyrs received their strength from Jesus. We will do the same.
 - Love for Jesus in the Eucharist, and his love for them from within in the Holy Eucharist, made them strong.
- Jesus wants to make us similarly strong.
 - Back in 2007, Pope Benedict wrote an extraordinary encyclical on Christian hope, *Spe Salvi*, in which he described how God gives us the strength to persevere, to be courageous until the end. In one section, he focused on Hebrews 10:34, where the author says, “You had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property (*hyparchonton*—Vg. *bonorum*), since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession (*hyparxin*—Vg. *substantiam*) and an abiding one.” He focuses on the words in Greek for “property” (*hyparchoton*, goods) and possession (*hyparxin*, substance). He writes, “The author speaks to believers who have undergone the experience of persecution. . . . *Hyparchonta* refers to property, to what in earthly life constitutes the means of support, indeed the basis, the “substance” for life, what we depend upon. This “substance”, life's normal source of security, has been taken away from Christians in the course of persecution. They have stood firm, though, because they considered this material substance to be of little account. They could abandon it because they had found a better “basis” for their existence—a basis that abides, that no one can take away. . . . Faith gives life a new basis, a new foundation on which we can stand, one that relativizes the habitual foundation, the reliability of material income. A new freedom is created with regard to this habitual foundation of life. . . . This new freedom, the awareness of the new “substance” which we have been given, is revealed not only in martyrdom, . . . [but] above all, it is seen in the great acts of renunciation, from the monks of ancient times to Saint Francis of Assisi and those of our contemporaries who enter modern religious Institutes and movements and leave everything for love of Christ, so as to bring to men and women the faith and love of Christ, and to help those who are suffering in body and spirit. In their case, the new “substance” has proved to be a genuine ‘substance.’ . . . In their case, it has been demonstrated that this new life truly possesses and is “substance” that calls forth life for others. For us who contemplate these figures, their way of acting and living is *de facto* a ‘proof’ that the things to come, the promise of Christ, are not only a reality that we await, but a real presence.”

- Jesus in the Eucharist is that genuine substance, that real presence, that is a better basis for our existence. He is the pearl of great price, the treasure buried in the field, worth selling everything else we have to obtain.
- When we know he is with us, risen from the dead, we no longer fear even death, because we know that death can't stop the holy communion we have with him. When we know that we receive, in this sacrament, the body crucified for us and the blood pour out for us on Calvary, then we no longer fear suffering the same way. When we know that his words on the Eucharist led many of his disciples to wander away, thinking he was a sick cannibal, we recognize that we can deal much better with derision.
- Cardinal François Xavier Nguyen van Thuan.
 - Imprisoned for 13 years, 9 in solitary confinement.
 - Stomach medicine.
 - The Eucharist gave him strength to carry on.
- Let's get practical. How do we grow in Eucharistic courage?
 - Taking Jesus in the Eucharist seriously. Recognizing that it is really him.
 - We're often not practical enough when it comes to Jesus in the Eucharist. We treat the Mass and the Eucharist as something holy, but not really God incarnate. We treat Jesus as a spiritual vitamin or a dessert for our soul.
 - We think taking two ibuprofen tablets will have more of an impact in our life than receiving the Eucharist!
 - Once we begin, however, to recognize it's truly the Risen Jesus, with us, everything begins to change.
 - Mass becomes the most important thing we could do.
 - But he gives us that strength not by magic or superstition, like the Israelites sometimes had with the Ark of the Covenant. When we're conscious of his presence, however, and act in communion with him, we are transformed. He fortifies us. We know that we can do all things in him who strengthens us.
- Perseverance
 - We live in an age in which many people give up: on prayer, fighting sin, suffering, Mass, Confession, marriage, religious vows, priestly vocations, jobs, hope, even life itself. We need courage never to give up, never to stop running the race, fighting the good fight, keeping the faith and growing in it. The virtue of perseverance, correlatively, helps us to grow in courage that, in turn, helps us persevere more, in a virtuous spiral upward.
 - Perseverance and patience go together. Patience means principally not an ability to wait but a capacity to suffer. The word patience comes from the Latin *patior*, to "suffer," which is why we call the sick in hospitals "patients." Courage requires that we do not have an excessive fear of pain and of where our fear of pain ultimately derives, the fear of death. And courage makes us capable of suffering.

- Not being afraid to die through regular meditation on death
 - The last practice I'll mention is not being afraid to die through regular meditation on death.
 - The *Imitation of Christ*, Thomas à Kempis' 15th-century spiritual classic, advised us that the easiest way to overcome the fear of death is to ponder it each day. "In every deed and every thought, act as though you were to die this very day."
 - Once we start doing that, we start taking every day more seriously: we do not procrastinate on telling family members and friends that we love them, we ask forgiveness from God and those we've wronged while we still have time, we let pass so many things that in the final analysis don't matter much, and we start to get our real priorities straight.
 - What we saw on United 93.
 - Message of the Capuchins: "Where you are, we once were. Where we are, one day you'll be. Remember death. Learn truly how to live."
 - When we pray each day Jesus' last words from the Cross, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46), we become emboldened, like Jesus, not to have our life taken from us but rather freely to lay it down (Jn 10:18).
 - When we're not afraid to die because we've rehearsed it daily in prayer, we will be ready to offer our life without fear should that prove necessary.
- Conclusion
 - Because lack of courage is one of the biggest crises facing the Church today, God, in response, will give the Church, and each of us, the help we need. Let's seize it.
 - And our witness to God in the midst of a world eaten alive by anxiety can encourage others.
 - It's a time for Catholics to show that we truly believe Jesus' words, "Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid!" (Mk 6:50), and, like waves of apostles, saints and martyrs throughout the centuries, boldly lead others to take courage, too, and come to its source, to whom be "blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor, power and might forever and ever. Amen." (Rev 7:12)