

## **Homily: Cardinal Vincent Nichols**

Basílica Menor de Nuestra Señora de Luján

*Sunday, 10 Feb 2019*

Today is a privilege for me to celebrate Mass at this great shrine of Nuestra Señora de Luján. I thank his Excellency Archbishop Agustin Radrizzani for his gracious permission and his presence here today. Unfortunately I do not speak Spanish well and so I have asked for help in offering to you this Homily.

Lujan is known as here in Argentina as the Capital of Faith. This is surely due to the presence of this revered and precious image of our Holy Mother. I come as one of a countless number of faithful pilgrims to entrust myself, my life, my ministry to her, especially under her title of The Virgin of Lujan. Here I ask that she gives me the strength and the courage to respond always more generously to the call of our Blessed Lord to be his humble and dedicated servant.

In the first reading of our Mass this morning we heard the Prophet Isaiah speak the words 'Here I am, send me'. I wish to echo those words myself. I ask every one of you present this morning to be willing to say these same words, from the depth of your hearts. In response to the invitation of the Lord to be his missionary disciples, let us all say: 'Here I am, Lord, send me!' In the Gospel reading, too, we see St Peter leave everything and begin his discipleship, following Jesus to the end.

The Virgin Mary shows us the way. She too offered her life in service of God's plan when she said 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me, according to your word!' (Lk 1.38). Let us imitate her in our readiness to follow the will of God every moment of our day. In doing so lies our lasting happiness.

Isaiah, Peter and Mary show us what is necessary if our hearts are to be ready to give this response each day. Two things are necessary.

The first is this. Isaiah made answer only because he was drawn into a vision of the great mystery of God. It was awesome and shook him to his foundations. His heart was broken open through this experience of the majesty of God. In the Gospel, we see Peter confounded by what he has just seen of the power of Jesus in the miraculous catch of fish. Only out of this experience is he ready to leave all and follow Jesus. Mary, too, made her reply when she was wrapped in awe at the appearance of the Angel Gabriel. Mary too was shaken by what had touched her. The Angel had to reassure her. 'Mary, do not be afraid!'

If we are going to be ready to serve the Lord, we too have to be touched by the wonder of God. This is not easy. God may seem far from us and it is hard for us to

raise our eyes to see Him. Fear not because God has come to us in our poor and broken state. In our day, order to see the glory of God we do not have to lift up our eyes to the heights for he has come into our world at our level. We do not have to lift up our heads to see the child born in the stable for he has come down to meet us in the circle of our sight. Mary who has made this possible through her 'Yes'. And she never ceases to bring her Son to us, and to bring us to her Son. We too may gaze upon the mystery of God, now made present in the stable, made visible in the Cross. Then we too, deeply touched in our hearts, can say 'Yes, here I am. Send me!'

Yet there is a second step, too.

Isaiah, in his experience of God, is overcome with a sense of his total unworthiness. He cries out: 'What a wretched state I am in! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips!' (Is 6.5). Peter, too, is overcome with his burden of guilt. He falls to his knees before Jesus and cries out 'Leave me Lord; I am a sinful man!' (Lk 5.8). We too can echo these same words. As we kneel before the Lord, in prayer, in adoration, in approaching the altar for Holy Communion, we too know so well that we are sinful creatures who live in a broken world.

Yet Isaiah and Peter and each one of us is raised to our feet through the mercy of God. We too hear the words 'Do not be afraid!' We too are touched by the holiness of God, not in burning coals as for Isaiah, but with the power of the same Holy Spirit coming to us in the Sacraments of the Church.

These are the two springs from which flows our mission: first that we know a little of the beauty of God and of God's intention for us, his beloved creation; and secondly, that we have felt the caress of God's mercy in our hearts. Out of these two great truths comes our mission, our being sent out to show in our lives these two great pillars of humanity: a sense of the dignity of every human person, and the gift of compassionate forgiveness. Without these two realities our humanity is lost, for it is then reduced to a struggle either to dominate, or simply to survive.

Isaiah described his world as being made up of 'a people of unclean lips'. We too know that our world is marked by many dimensions of evil. We know the suffering of many. We know the hurt inflicted by the shortcomings of our ways of living, sometimes willfully, sometimes flowing from the unjust structures of our societies. It is into these dark places that we attempt to shine the light of the Risen Lord, He who says to us every day 'Do not be afraid!' (Lk 5.10); 'See I am with you, yes even to the end of time!' (Mt 28.20).

There is one particular darkness I wish to draw to your attention, as it is the darkness that has brought me here. It is the darkness of human trafficking, of modern day slavery. There are over 40 million people in our world today locked in this darkness, deprived of liberty, of identity, of adequate food and shelter. They have been tricked,

deceived and traded, as if they were no more than an object for sale and use. Human trafficking occurs in every country, probably in every city and town. It is, in the words of Pope Francis, 'a wound in the flesh of humanity' 'A great wound in the Body of Christ'. In these days there is a major conference taking place here in Buenos Aires exploring what we as the Church can do in the fight against the evil trade. We are working with the Argentinian Federal Police, under the leadership of General Commissioner Nestor Roncaglia and seeking to build an effective partnership between those forces and the resources of the Church. I thank His Eminence Cardinal Poli and the other representatives of the Church from Argentina and neighbouring countries for their leadership. Today I ask all of you to support us with your prayers, with a growing awareness of the reality of human trafficking and slavery in your midst and with a readiness to help in this work. For this I thank you.

At this wonderful shrine of the Our Blessed Lady of Lujan, I pray that she will be our great patron. Here Mary is known by countless people throughout this country, and this continent, as the 'Mother of the humble and poor, Mother of those who suffer and simply hope'. Today I commend to her those who are suffering as victims of human trafficking, those who have lost all hope and who are locked into the darkness of their captivity. She is their Mother in such a special way and today we commend them to her. I pray too that each one of us, formed by the Holy Word of God we have just heard, and following its pathway, may be ready to say 'Here I am, Lord. Send me!' For we too have glimpsed the goodness of the Lord. We too have been blessed with His mercy. We too can go from here with a fresh heart and a renewed readiness to serve Him who alone can break open every darkness and bring its captives into his wonderful light.

Of Virgin of Lujan, today we come before you as Mother of the humble and poor, Mother of those who suffer. Hear our prayers for all victims of human trafficking. Strengthen our resolve to fight against this evil. Give us a readiness to cooperate graciously who all who share in this struggle and give hope to those who dwell in its darkness. We thank you, O Blessed Mother, for your readiness to do the will of the Lord. Touch our hearts that we too may not be afraid but respond like you to all that is asked of us.

Amen.