



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



HOMILY FOR THE TEMPORARY PROFESSION OF BROTHER DUNSTAN

Abbot Thomas Frerking

September 5, 2009

Brother Dunstan, we celebrate today your dedication of your whole self to the Lord as a Benedictine monk of this community, a dedication which we pray will be confirmed in a few years' time by a promise for life. The readings you have chosen for this your Profession Mass express with precision and clarity the character of this dedication and its origin and end.

First, Brother Dunstan, the origin. The origin is the Lord, not you. "You did not choose me," says the Lord, "but no, I chose you." The origin is the Lord's call to you. We hear of it in that First Reading you selected: "Arise, O fairest one, and come." "O fairest of the children of men": that is what the Scripture calls the Lord himself. "Arise, O fairest of the children of men, and come." This call is the call of love: The Lord looked on the rich young man, the Gospel tells us, and *loved* him, and called him. You heard this call of love early in your life, Brother Dunstan. But you learned only later what is at the heart of this love for us human beings in this world, for us sinful human beings, us sinful human beings who are not worthy of the call. What is at the heart of this love is *mercy*, the mercy which forgives all our sins, which washes them away, which raises us up and makes us able to answer the call, which recreates us as the fairest one, able to go to the Lord.

Then, the dedication itself, as the response to the call. Some hear the call to dedicate their *whole* self to the Lord, and the monastic life remains the great archetype of this total dedication of self to the Lord. This dedication is love in return for love: in return for the Lord's love of us – "This is the love I mean," says Saint John, "not our love for God, but God's love for us" – in return for this love, we dedicate our whole self to the love of God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and to the love of neighbor as ourself. And first, the love of neighbor: for the monk, the love of the brother monk, and of all who come to the monk, who come to the monastery, seeking, seeking, seeking. So we come to the Second Reading you chose: one of the most perfect epitomes in Scripture of life according to the Rule of Saint Benedict. "Put you on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, the bowels of mercy, benignity, humility, meekness, patience" – do, that is, for others, what he did for you, he, who, though he was in the form of God, emptied himself, and took the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man, and being found a man, humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross." Give back love and mercy for the love and mercy given to you, give back love and mercy to the Lord by giving love and mercy to your brother monks, to all in the great family which surrounds this monastery, and so important for you, Brother Dunstan, to the young people whom you teach. Already you see your teaching so thoroughly integrated into the monastic life, guiding your teaching by the great second chapter of the Rule, which tells you to love each one, to care for each one, to



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accommodate yourself to each one's temperament and mentality, to discipline and correct each one, to sow the seed of divine justice in the mind of each one. And yes, the Rule tells you, as the special work of the monk for each one, to pray for each one, to pray for each student, each brother monk, each man and woman whom you serve, for all men and women, for the peace of the world.

The love of neighbor. But then the other and even greater dedication, to the love, the direct love, of the Lord himself, with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. So that Second Reading says: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; in psalms and hymns and spiritual canticles, with thankfulness sing in your hearts to God." There, Brother Dunstan, is the other great part of the monastic life, there is prayer -- the Divine Office, the liturgy, personal prayer -- there is singing in your heart to God. And as life quietens, and prayer grows and deepens and conforms more and more of your being to itself, we come to that great Gospel you have chosen, the Gospel which from the time of the Fathers has always been seen as expressing the two great phases of the monastic life, and in so many ways, of every Christian life: Martha -- the phase of dedicated and loving service to the neighbor, and then Mary -- the phase simply of sitting at the Lord's feet, listening to his word. Here we have what in the great tradition is called 'contemplation', which the great Pope Paul VI describes as "intentness on the Lord in thought and love". All the love and service of neighbor purifies you for this contemplation, and in this contemplation in its deepest form is all the love of God, and all the love of neighbor, too.

The call of the Lord to you, Brother Dunstan; your dedication, by his grace, of your whole self to him in the monastic life -- now finally, what is the end of this dedication, what does it at last, by the love and mercy of the Lord, lead to? It leads, says Saint Benedict, to this: that we should "*see* him who has called us into his kingdom", and so that we should become one with him forever. So Saint Paul: "Now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face", and again, "we, with unveiled faces, shall behold the glory of the Lord, and be transformed into his image from glory to glory", and then, Saint John: "Beloved, we are already called the children of God, and that is what we are. But what we shall be in the future has not yet been revealed. All we know is, that when it is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

This, Brother Dunstan, is the life, the blessed life, you have chosen. You embrace it with that lovable joy of heart, singing of heart, which is a special gift of the Lord to you, which gives all of us joy and singing of the heart, too. Come then, Brother Dunstan, and by the strength of the Lord, make your vows to the Lord.