

Visit of the Relics of Blessed Louis and Zelig Martin

We are indeed privileged to be here this evening at Christ the King Church in the presence of the relics of these two good and holy people, Blessed Louis and Zelig Martin. In 2008 they were only the second couple ever to be beatified and we hope that this coming October they will be the first ever couple to be canonized. We see in this couple the great beauty of married life lived in response to God. This evening we pray for all married couples, particularly for those couples who are experiencing hardship, difficulty and suffering, and we ask Blessed Louis and Zelig to pray for them also.

Not only are this couple likely to be canonized but they are the parents of a saint, St. Therese of the Child Jesus. Zelig said to their children, "My task in this life, as your mother, is to help you become saints." In this couple and in their family life there is a constant seeking of God's purpose for them, an awareness of the need for the Christian always to seek God's will and to ask, "What is God's purpose for me at this time or in this situation?" From an early stage in their lives Louis and Zelig sought to pursue a vocation to religious life. Both were refused admission to respective religious communities, Louis because he could not master Latin and Zelig because of poor health. They both accepted this as the will of God for them.

They were married on July 13, 1858, and decided, at the beginning of their marriage, to maintain perfect chastity. They welcomed to their home a five-year-old boy whose widowed father was at the time raising eleven children. Here we see charity at the heart of their marriage. They decided then to have as many children as possible in order to raise them and offer them to the Lord. They had nine children, losing four at an early age. The surviving children, five girls, all became religious sisters in the Carmelite monastery in Lisieux. Family life for them meant helping the children to fulfil their God-given purpose.

Zelig taught the children the morning offering of their heart to the good God, and the simple practice of accepting daily difficulties, "to please Jesus." Perhaps this was the basis of "the little way" of St. Therese that has helped so many to holiness of life. The spiritual life of Louis and Zelig, living out their vocation to marriage and family life, influenced the growth in holiness of Therese and her sisters.

What has become known as the universal call to holiness is given practical expression in Blessed Louis and Zelig because it is holiness of life lived out in

the world, in marriage and family life, in everyday lived experience. As we venerate their relics this evening we can take away one very important insight, and it is that holiness of life is possible for each of us precisely in the midst of everyday life. Holiness of life is not only for particular people in the Church, it is for everyone, so that each of us in the circumstances of daily life can develop a living relationship with God, and seek and find God's purpose for us. We are, each of us, gifted uniquely and personally by God, so that we can fulfil our God-given purpose.

In 1877 Zélie died at the age of forty-five, having been diagnosed with breast cancer a few months earlier. Louis was left to care for their five children, the youngest of whom was Thérèse who was four and a half years old. Louis himself experienced ill health in the final years of his life and he died in July 1894. The loss of four of their children as well as their experience of suffering and ill health makes the Martin family like any other in terms of the tragedy and loss that family life can sadly sometimes experience. Perhaps what makes them exceptional is their submission to the will of God in everything, their deep faith in God and in His plan for them, and the way in which their children too embraced the will of God in their own lives.

The reading from John's Gospel has Jesus questioning Peter three times. Peter had denied the Lord three times and here he is given the opportunity three times to express his love for Jesus. Jesus commands Peter, "Feed my lambs," "Feed my sheep." Then Jesus instructs Peter on leaving his own will aside and doing only the will of God. This path would ultimately lead Peter to his death. The way of life for the Christian is the way of the Cross. And yet it is also a life lived in the joy of the Gospel. Let us pray this evening for renewed commitment to pursuing holiness of life in the bits and pieces of everyday, in the joys and sufferings of our Christian witness.

Blessed Louis and Zélie – Pray for us.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux – Pray for us.

All holy men and women – Pray for us.