

## **Homily: Sept. 13, 2021**

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

We gather to celebrate the boundless and inclusive love of God as exhibited in Jesus. We also commemorate St. John Chrysostom. Chrysostom means “golden mouth” due to his great homilies. Besides that, he sacrificed himself for the poor. We pray that our love for the poor and for those who are different than ourselves will become more inclusive and compassionate as God’s love. So, we call out, Lord have mercy.

I find this gospel scene to be powerful, especially for Americans in this moment. We see two men, Jesus and a Roman Centurion, who relate to one another with deep respect in spite of major differences. A gentile, the Roman Centurion, is anguishing over the oncoming death of his slave. He sends Jewish elders to ask Jesus to thwart the death of his slave. Yet, respectful of Jesus as a Jew, he asks that Jesus heal his slave from a distance, so as not to inflict ritual impurity upon himself by entering a gentile house.

Jesus fulfills both wishes of the Roman centurion. He doesn’t go into the house of this gentile and he heals the slave mid-journey. More astounding yet, Jesus ranks the Roman centurion’s faith higher than the faith of anyone in Israel. Jesus acknowledges the centurion as faith-filled—believing in God’s goodness coming through Jesus.

This example of deep mutual respect can inspire and strengthen us today, living in a world so filled with suspicion, and as Fr. Bob Rossi, osc, said yesterday in his homily, a world sometimes blind and even resistant to seeing faith and plain human goodness in others, especially in those who are different.

Such blindness occurred four days after 9/11, when a man entered a Mesa, Arizona, gas station and shot the owner, because the owner wore a turban, had a beard and was dark skinned. The shooter deemed the Sikh owner a terrorist and acclaimed himself a good patriot. The gas station therefore became “ground zero number two,” the scene of the first death as a result of the Twin Towers tragedy.

This past Saturday, an acquaintance, who lives a few blocks from that gas station in Mesa, told several of us how shocked and hurt his then fifteen-year-old son felt upon hearing news of the gas-station owner’s death—someone he knew as a very good man, whenever they bought gas at his station. (By happenstance, the story about the dead man’s brother’s anti-discrimination and peace-making efforts in the past 20 years is detailed in yesterday’s Arizona Republic newspaper).

The example of deep mutual respect between Jesus and the Roman Centurion is so necessary, because now, 20 years after 9/11, too many citizens of this country are once again labeling and generalizing Middle-Eastern refugees as dangerous, rather than seeing among them people who also believe in God and, if Muslim, highly regard Jesus, albeit their beliefs about God and Jesus differ from our Christian belief.

Nonetheless, how important that we first of all see these sisters and brothers of ours as people who uphold religious values of compassion, mercy, family and education, as well as the necessity for good religion. These are the bases upon which we can together build a better world and a better United States of America.

Amazed at the centurion, Jesus said, "Not even in Israel have I found such faith." May we, too, have the eyes and heart of Jesus.