

UNVEILING AND BLESSING
OF THE STATUE OF BLESSED JOHN DUNS SCOTUS
BLESSED JOHN DUNS SCOTUS FRIARY
SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE, LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN
12 DECEMBER 2012

REMARKS

Blessed John Duns Scotus, heroic Friar of the Seraphic Order of Saint Francis of Assisi, whose image we have just unveiled and blessed, is most appropriately the patron saint of the Friary of the Franciscans of the Immaculate who serve at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. His veneration is also most fittingly given prominence at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mary Immaculate, Mother of God, for he is, as the inscription at the base of the statue indicates, not only the Subtle Doctor, *Doctor Subtilis*, that is, a Friar of extraordinary intellectual gifts which he placed totally at the service of Our Lord and His Mystical Body. But he is also the Defender of the Immaculate, *Defensor Immaculatae*, the first of the great theologians to defend efficaciously what the Church has always believed about the conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, namely, that she was conceived without any stain of original sin, that she, from the first moment of her life, was granted the privilege of enjoying in advance the Redemption which God the Son, to be conceived under her Immaculate Heart, would win for all mankind.

Blessed John Duns Scotus helps us to understand the great and mysterious privilege granted to the Blessed Virgin Mary, in order that, in accord with God's all-marvelous plan for our salvation, she might provide the Immaculate Womb in which God the Son could fittingly take our human nature and from which He could be born to save us from our sins and from everlasting death. Without doubt, the Franciscan Friars who carried out so wonderfully the work of the First Evangelization of our continent, including the conversion and baptism of Saint Juan Diego, messenger of Our Lady of Guadalupe, were profoundly influenced by Blessed John's brilliant teaching of the truths of the faith and, above all, by his teaching of the truth of the Immaculate Conception. Preeminent among those Friars was Bishop Juan de Zumárraga, the First Bishop of Mexico, to whom Our Lady addressed her request that a chapel be built for pilgrimage, in

which she might manifest the all-merciful love of God for His children, without boundary or exception.

Born of devout Catholic parents in 1265 in the ancient village of Duns in Scotland, hence the surnames Duns and Scotus or Scot, Blessed John Duns Scotus received a thoroughly Catholic education in his home and at school. In his youth, he suffered from a crippling dullness of mind which hindered him in his fervent and steadfast desire to plumb the depths of the mysteries of our Catholic faith. In his intense suffering, he turned to Our Lady, the Seat of Wisdom, and begged her “to open his mind, so that he might be able to progress in his studies of eternal truths.”¹ Our Lady heard his prayer and, through her intercession, he attained a brilliance of mind which was to astound his confrères, his fellow students, his fellow professors, and his own students for the rest of his life. Having received the gift of a brilliant mind for the study of philosophy and theology, Blessed John Duns Scotus used the gift, above all, to give glory to God in His only-begotten Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, and to bring others to give Him glory, and to venerate the Immaculate Mother of the Redeemer, and to bring others to venerate her.² He has left us a rich corpus of writings which continue to be studied by many today for the deepening of the knowledge and love of the great mysteries of our faith.

Blessed John Duns Scotus, inspired by his uncle, Friar Elias Duns, took the habit of the Franciscan Friars in 1280 and received a thoroughly solid religious formation at “the austere but inspiring novitiate of Dumfries, an eagle’s nest among the rocks of Nith”³ in Scotland. The sanctity and knowledge, in which he was formed during the novitiate, after the heart of his father in religion, Saint Francis of Assisi, continued to develop in him throughout his lifetime. Eventually, the young Friar undertook the study of philosophy and then theology at the recently founded Franciscan College at Oxford University, and, because of his brilliance, soon assumed the responsibility of professor.

On March 17, 1291, he was ordained to the Holy Priesthood. From that most important moment in his life, the offering of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass became the center of his life. He referred to the Eucharistic Sacrifice as the “act par excellence in the

¹ Stefano M. Manelli, F.I., *Blessed John Duns Scotus, Marian Doctor*, tr. Franciscans of the Immaculate, New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2011, p. 3. [Hereafter, Manelli]

² Cf. Manelli, p. 4.

³ Manelli, p. 6.

whole Church.”⁴ His teaching on the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist and, in particular, on the Real Presence is one of the richest treasures of the very rich body of his theological writings. The great artist Raphael, in his famous fresco, “The Debate on the Holy Sacrament,” places Blessed John Duns Scotus “in the foreground with the most famous saints and doctors of the Church, while gathered around a splendid monstrance containing a sacred Host.”⁵

In 1291, he was sent to continue his studies at the University of Paris, the Sorbonne, the most prestigious of all the universities at the time. At the University of Paris, he continued to teach, as he had consistently taught, the truth of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. While at Oxford his teaching was universally accepted, he found a quite different situation at the Sorbonne. It was the common position of the professors at the University of Paris that the Blessed Virgin Mary was not granted the privilege of the Immaculate Conception but only the privilege of a purification in her mother’s womb, like that which was granted to Saint John the Baptist. Because of his contrary position, Blessed John Duns Scotus, according to the practice of the time, was invited to a public disputation of the matter in the presence of two representatives of the Roman Pontiff, the Bishop of Paris and his clergy, and the entire academic community. With humility and clarity, he efficaciously replied to every objection against the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. A biographer comments: “His ardent voice, his alert eyes, his face bathed in kindness, all helped to frame those replies Blessed John seemed to draw from the mysterious depths of Sacred Scripture, new but solid insights, logically and exactly formulated, exploding like so many shooting stars across the firmament of theology.”⁶ After the disputation, at which Blessed John Duns Scotus was held to have been clearly the victor, the professors of the prestigious University of Paris changed their position regarding the truth of the Immaculate Conception. They began to teach the truth and also to encourage strongly the fitting liturgical celebrations of the mystery.

Toward the end of the year 1307, Blessed John Duns Scotus was transferred to the University of Cologne and there, too, showed himself to be a humble and brilliant defender of Mary Immaculate. He was tireless in combatting the doctrinal and

⁴ Manelli, p. 12.

⁵ Manelli, p. 12.

⁶ Manelli, p. 22.

disciplinary errors which beset the Church in Germany at the time. It was in the midst of these many strenuous efforts to serve Our Lord and His Blessed Mother with every ounce of his energy, in fidelity to his religious profession in the Seraphic Order, that, less than a year after his arrival in Cologne, Blessed John succumbed to a fatal illness and died on November 8, 1308, at the age of 43. Regarding his death, a biographer writes:

What a feast in Paradise awaited the arrival of this charming Friar who lived in poverty and humility, but who burned with love for the truth he wanted to make known and loved by all men, all over the earth, throughout every age! What rejoicing in Paradise over the high praise to Christ the King and Mary Immaculate, Queen, which Blessed John had caused to ascend from university halls and pulpits on earth; from the gifted and simple, from the great and humble in England, in France, in Germany, and through his writings, from every land and nation!⁷

From the time of his passing from this life to the next, there has been a constant and profound veneration of Blessed John Duns Scotus. Although he has always been held, throughout the world, to be a saint, it was Pope John Paul II who, on March 20, 1993, declared him Blessed.

Time does not permit an adequate review of the great body of teaching of Blessed John Duns Scotus. On the happy occasion of the unveiling of his statue at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, I wish to underline just two prominent aspects of his teaching. They are highlighted in the Apostolic Letter *Alma Parens* of the Servant of God Pope Paul VI, issued in 1966, on the seventh centenary of the birth of John Duns Scotus. Pope Paul VI declared:

Saint Francis of Assisi's most beautiful ideal of perfection and the ardour of the Seraphic Spirit are embedded in the work of Scotus and inflame it, for he ever holds virtue of greater value than learning. Teaching as he does the pre-eminence of love over knowledge, the universal primacy of Christ, who was the greatest of God's works, the magnifier of the Holy Trinity and Redeemer of the human race, King in both the natural and supernatural orders, with the Queen of the world, Mary Immaculate,

⁷ Manelli, p. 29.

standing beside him, resplendent in her untarnished beauty, Scotus develops to its full height each point of revealed Gospel truths: those Saint John the Evangelist and Saint Paul understood to be pre-eminent in the divine plan of salvation.⁸

The entire teaching of Blessed John Duns Scotus is centered upon the primacy of Christ. For Scotus, and more importantly for the Church, “Jesus is the synthesis of the created and uncreated universe. Jesus is the supreme vertex of every being. Jesus is the absolute center of heaven and earth.”⁹

Secondly and inseparably connected with his teaching on the primacy of Christ is his teaching on the irreplaceable vocation and mission of Mary Immaculate. A biographer writes:

Precisely with regard to His Mother, therefore, Jesus has been the most perfect Redeemer. Applying the merits of the redemption to her in advance is a sign of His immense love and filial veneration. In such a way [Blessed John’s] solution of the difficulties [regarding the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception] not only harmonized with faith in the dogma of the universality of original sin and redemption, but also made the figure and work of Jesus, most perfect Redeemer, shine more brightly in the figure and privilege of Holy Mary, daughter of Adam, preredeemed, dazzling with the fullness of grace from the first instant of her conception.¹⁰

Having been privileged to participate in the unveiling and blessing of the statue of Blessed John Duns Scotus, I invite you to learn more about the teaching of Blessed John and so to reap the fruits of his fervent and steadfast study of the mysteries of our faith.

⁸ “Cuius in opere latent certe ferventque S. Francisci Asisinatis perfectionis pulcherrima forma et seraphici spiritus ardores, cum ibidem inter scire et bene vivere illi hoc praepolleat. Quia autem affirmat supereminentem scientiae caritatem, universum primatum Christi, summi operis Dei, magnificatoris SS. Trinitatis, Redemptoris humani generis, Regis in rerum naturae et supra naturam utroque ordine, prope quem splendet congenita pulchritudine Maria Immaculata, mundi Regina, evangelicae revelatae veritatis facit, ut sublime ferantur cacumina, singillatim ea, quae S. Ioannes Evangelista et S. Paulus Apostolus in Dei salutifero consilio eminentia et prominentia contuiti sunt.” Paulus PP. VI, Litterae Apostolicae *Alma Parens*, 14 Iulii 1966, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 58 (1966), pp. 611-612. English translation: Manelli, pp. 106-107.

⁹ Manelli, p. 91.

¹⁰ Manelli, p. 88.

We are blessed to enjoy the priestly ministrations of Father Peter Damian Mary Fehlner, renowned expert on Blessed John Duns Scotus, at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I also commend to you a little but very illuminating volume on Blessed John Duns Scotus, available at the *Flores Mariae* Gift Shop. It is written by Father Stefano Maria Manelli, Minister General of the Friars of the Immaculate, and is entitled *Blessed John Duns Scotus: Marian Doctor*.

Having unveiled and blessed the statue of Blessed John Duns Scotus, I wish to express heartfelt gratitude and esteem to the sculptor, Alexander Kostner of Sankt Ulrich or Ortisei in Italy, and to the architect, Sherry Wall of River Architects, and to Fowler and Hammer General Contractors. I thank, too, the Friars of the Immaculate who have prepared the rite for the unveiling and blessing of the statue and who, at Our Lady's Shrine, are faithful witnesses and teachers to the truths which Blessed John Duns Scotus so brilliantly taught, above all, the primacy of Christ and the Immaculate Conception of His Mother. I thank also all who have made possible the fitting and indeed beautiful representation of the Defender of the Immaculate at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Immaculate Mother of God.

Finally, I invite you to confide intentions for a miracle to the intercession of Blessed John Duns Scotus, so that soon his heroic sanctity may be officially and fully recognized by the universal Church, and so that many, one with the Immaculate Heart of Mary, will be assisted by his example and teaching to place their hearts more completely into the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I conclude with the prayer for the Canonization of Blessed John Duns Scotus:

O Most High, Almighty and gracious Lord, Who exalts the humble and confounds the proud of heart, grant us the great joy of seeing Blessed John Duns Scotus canonized. He honored your Son with the most sublime praises; he was the first to defend successfully the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary; he lived in heroic obedience to the Holy Father, to the Church and to the Seraphic Order. O Most Holy Father, God of infinite love, hear, we beseech you, our humble prayer, through the merits of your

only-begotten Son and of His Mother, Coredeptrix and Spouse of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ Amen.

Raymond Leo Cardinal BURKE

¹¹ Manelli, p. 102.