

# Sermon Father Donatus

Sermon given on the Feast of the Four Crowned Martyrs on 08.11.2014 in Strasbourg Cathedral.

I greet you in the name of our three-fold God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and of our Blessed Mother Mary and the Four Crowned Martyrs, who we venerate as the patron saints of stonemasons.

These very same words can be found at the beginning of the ancient constitution for the Strasbourg stonemasons' guild that was compiled in 1459, and which all stonemasons throughout the Occident were bound to observe. Thus, masons and sculptors from all over Europe have gathered this evening, inside the splendid cathedral of Strasbourg, in honour of their heavenly patron saints.

I also greet all those gathered here who adhere to the ethical values that are expressed in this Strasbourg Mason's constitution.

One thousand years ago, the foundation stone for this building was laid: here we are celebrating this service of thanksgiving. Thousands of our stonemason colleagues contributed the work of their hands, minds and hearts to accomplish this marvellous Gothic structure. In their work, they observed the correct measurements and the right discipline in such a way that this beautiful cathedral could arise.

Nowadays, though, who gives a thought to the stonemasons, when they are admiring the wonderful rose window on the West front of the Cathedral, and the way it lights up in the evening sunshine? It was their blessed hands that created it. Many of them suffered untimely deaths, their lungs affected and calcified by stone dust. Let us thank God for them at this hour; may they find their reward in Him.

We, who are still living, wish to place ourselves under the protection of the four crowned martyrs. Their names are Claudius, Castorius, Symphorianus and Nicostratus. They were Roman stonemasons who worked in the Pannonian quarries which are now in Southern Hungary. Because they were Christians, they refused to obey Emperor Diocletian's command to carve the stone from the quarry into heathen statues, although they were well aware that this refusal would bring about their deaths.

As Christians, they held firm to their faith, thereby providing an example of Christian steadfastness that has continued to shine brightly though all the darkness of the past centuries, right down to our times. This is why the masons of Occident selected them to be their patron saints.

My dear sisters and brothers in faith!

In the stone workshops which still adhere to the ancient traditions, it is still the custom today, when a stonemason requires the help of his colleagues, for him to approach them and say these ancient words "you are addressed". The person who is addressed in this way will lay his own work aside without a murmur and help his colleague, regardless of how much time it takes. Once this assistance is over, he is dismissed with these words: "MAY THE LORD BE OBLIGED AND THANKED", which means, "I am also obliged to help you, with many thanks".

This is exactly how our Master JESUS CHRIST addresses us in his joyful summons when he says: "You are the light of the world ! ... You are the salt of the earth!"

The stonemasons who built this cathedral lived and worked in the spirit of this message. The airy forms of the nearby pillar of angels proclaim this, and this broad, high, light-filled space turns human voices raised in song into a heavenly celebration. sound. Let us absorb the message of the Gospel and become beacons of light in the darkness of our age.

I was able to meet two such beacons of light of our era when I was a French prisoner of war in the seminary behind barbed wire as theologian in Chartres. One of them was the German priest Abbé Franz Stock. He was parish priest to the German congregation in Paris, and he tirelessly laboured with all his physical and spiritual forces to secure the reconciliation between Germany and France. In 1945, he was commissioned by the French government of the time to establish a barbed wire seminary in Chartres, which he then spent the last two years of his life directing it. He died a few months after the seminary was closed. The second beacon of light that I met as a prisoner of war was the Paris Nuncio of the time, Angelo Roncalli, who visited us behind the barbed wire on many occasions; he was declared a saint only a few months ago, as Pope John XXIII. Both men have deeply influenced my life. Thus I am able to stand before you this evening, in the 94th year of my life, to tell you the message that JESUS gave us: ... you too are lights of the world, ... you too are the salt of the earth. What a high calling: to be a LIGHT in the darkness of our age.

My dear people; I stand before you as a priest and a stonemason. My hands too have sought to make the stone speak. So I know how hard stone can be and how much skill, sensitivity and patience is needed to make it capable of speech. But I have also learnt what a joyful moment it is to see that the piece made with own hands is well done. The stones that surround us are ready to speak. Let's listen to them; they have so much to tell us.

**AMEN**

\*The Roman Emperor Diocletian (ca. 243-305) ordered an effigy of Asclepius, the god of medicine and healing, to be made. When the four masons refused the Emperor was furious and commanded that they be shut up in lead coffins and cast into the river, which was done on 8 November.