

Easter 4: Saturday

Filipino Ministry Consultation Meeting

St. Matthew's Church

28 April 2018

Dear brother priests and deacons; brothers and sisters in the Risen Christ:

Introduction

This day of consultation called for and planned by our Filipino Ministry Office under the very able direction of Deacon Greg Barcelon, fittingly begins with the celebration of this Holy Mass, when we invoke the Lord's blessing upon what we are engaged in. The purpose of the day is to begin the process of developing a comprehensive Pastoral Plan for the Filipinos in the Archdiocese of Vancouver. Such a Plan is to foster a fuller participation and integration into parish life of Filipinos in our local Church.

You are a great blessing and the source of enormous witness to the Gospel. Indeed, the vitality of our Church is unimaginable without your presence, the strength of your devotional life, and your participation in innumerable apostolic activities. I am especially grateful to the many associations and movements which contribute to building up family life, the formation of our young people, the life of prayer, and the promotion of outreach to the marginalized. A big thank you is you due!

As this consultation meeting you will share with one another some of the challenges faced by Filipinos in living and handing on our

Catholic faith. I am especially pleased that the Pastoral Plan will focus on how to further the integration of Filipinos in the life of our parish families and steps to be taken to foster vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life from among our young people.

Let us pray that the fire of the Holy Spirit will give us the wisdom to discern carefully and charitably what best corresponds to the Lord's will for building up our local Church, so that we may be the community which he wants us to be.

Gospel

Now let's take a look at this morning's Gospel, which takes us to the very heart of what it means for us to believe in God, which is, of course, essential to all that we do.

As the Passion was approaching, at the Last Supper, Jesus has a conversation with his disciples in which he talks about God the Father (cf. Jn 14:2-9). At a certain point the Apostle Philip asks Jesus: "Master, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied" (Jn 14:8). The practical Philip said out loud what we ourselves would like to say: "we want to see God, to know him, show us the Father." He asks to "see" the Father, to see his face.

Jesus replies not only to Philip but also to us: "Whoever has seen

me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9).¹

This affirmation was later taken by John the Evangelist, who recorded Jesus’ words at the Supper, where he writes: “No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (Jn 1:18). Jesus is the only one who reveals the Father, who tells us who God really is. “He explains to the world what the Father is like, not because he is the Father, but because he is one with the Father in the communion of divine life.”²

In Jesus Christ, who allowed his heart to be pierced for us on the Cross, the true face of God can be seen. “Jesus does not tell us something about God, he does not merely speak of the Father but is the Revelation of God, because he is God and thus reveals the face of God.”³

People have strange ideas about God. They use the word “God,” but mean very different things. He is a life force, a man with a white beard, a law-giver, a distant creator who made the world and then left it alone. So many different things!

In Jesus, however, we truly see who God is and what he thinks

¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, General Audience (16 January 2013).

² St. John Paul II, Homily, Delhi (1 February 1986).

³ Benedict XVI, General Audience (16 January 2013).

about us, or, to use Philip's words, what he looks like!⁴ The face of Jesus – that is, who he is and what he does – pulls back the veil on the great mystery of God. All we have to do is to contemplate the face of Jesus to answer the question, what is God really like? Is a distant or close? Is he loving or harsh?⁵

In one of his homilies Benedict XVI commented beautifully on this passage in this way:

God does not leave us groping in the dark. He has shown himself to us as a man. In his greatness he has let himself become small. “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father,” Jesus says (Jn 14:9). God has taken on a human face. He has loved us even to the point of letting himself be nailed to the Cross for our sake, in order to bring the sufferings of mankind to the very heart of God. Today . . . it is important to state clearly the God in whom we believe, and to proclaim confidently that this God has a human face. Only this can free us from being afraid of God – which is ultimately at the

⁴ Cf. Benedict XVI, General Audience (6 September 2006).

⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, General Audience (6 September 2006): “To express ourselves in accordance with the paradox of the Incarnation we can certainly say that God gave himself a human face, the Face of Jesus, and consequently, from now on, if we truly want to know the Face of God, all we have to do is to contemplate the Face of Jesus! In his Face we truly see who God is and what he looks like!”

root of modern atheism. Only this God saves us from being afraid of the world and from anxiety before the emptiness of life. Only by looking to Jesus Christ does our joy in God come to fulfilment and become redeemed joy.⁶

When we affirm that God has a face, we mean that he is a “you” who can enter into a relationship with him. He is not withdrawn in his heavenly dwelling place, looking down at humanity from on high. “God is certainly above all things, but he addresses us, he listens to us, he sees us, he speaks to us, he makes a covenant, he is capable of love. The history of salvation is the history of God with humanity, it is the history of this relationship of God who gradually reveals himself to man, who makes himself, his face, known.”⁷

In the life of the Church we have almost endless possibilities of coming to know God. But it is all in vain if this knowledge is simply limited to knowing something *about* God, rather than knowing him *personally*.

Jesus makes it possible for each of us personally to know God, to become his “friends” (Jn 15:15). In Jesus we see the perfect love of God who cares for us passionately, loving us to the point of laying down his

⁶ Benedict XVI, Homily, Regensburg (12 September 2006).

⁷ Benedict XVI, General Audience (16 January 2013).

life for us on the Cross. Jesus not only tells us this, far more to the point, he lives God's unconditional love for us.

The face of God can be known by contemplating the human face of Jesus. But that is not all. Jesus identifies himself with us. Did he not say that when we care for the sick, visit the imprisoned, feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty this is the same as doing it for him (cf. Mt 25)? These faces reveal to us the face of Jesus – and his suffering flesh – just as his face reveals the Father. They also tell us what God is like. And in our life

we must allocate a central place to loving our neighbour, that love which, in the light of the Crucified One, enables us to recognize the face of Jesus in the poor, in the weak and in the suffering. This is only possible if the true face of Jesus has become familiar to us through listening to his word, in an inner conversation with him, in entering this word so that we truly meet him, and of course, in the Mystery of the Eucharist.⁸

Conclusion

Here now, as we continue the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we shall see God's face. We enter into an intimate relationship with him; and, at

⁸ Benedict XVI, General Audience (16 January 2013).

the same time, we learn to turn our gaze to the final moment of history when he will satisfy us fully with the splendid light of his face.

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