

Lunar New Year

Holy Name of Jesus

12 February 2018

Dear brother priests; dear Sisters; and dear friends in Christ who have gathered for this Mass of Thanksgiving:

Introduction

The Lord God is inviting all of us this morning to a prayer of thanksgiving. It is a real joy for me to be with you to celebrate this Holy Mass, as the Chinese community in the Lower Mainland joins hundreds of millions of people around the world in marking the end of the Year of the Rooster and the beginning of the Year of the Dog.

Like all Catholics, we began the Church's year, the liturgical year, with Advent, preparing for the coming of Christ, his birth, and now his ministry of teaching and healing, and then his passion, death, resurrection, ascension into heaven and sending of the Spirit. We do this year after year – as we follow the life of Jesus. This year, the liturgical, is really the most important, for its celebration marks the journey we are all on in our pilgrimage to heaven.

Along with most of the world's inhabitants, we likewise celebrated the beginning of the civil year on January 1, though for us also the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. But even this civil new year contains within it a "memory" of our civilization's Christian roots. Sometimes we say it is "A.D", which means "Anno Domini" – in the year of Our Lord. While most people don't think much about it, this means that we are

now living in the 2,018th year after the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

The Readings

From today's readings from Sacred Scripture I want to give you just two thoughts. And so today I want you to remember just two words "forgive" and "trust." Just two. Let me explain.

Forgive

In our first reading, the Apostle Paul tells us how the followers of Jesus are to live. We are to be compassionate to others, kind, humble, gentle and patient.

But above all Paul encourages us to be forgiving of others. We all know what it's like to be hurt or offended by someone, especially when that someone is a friend. We feel rejected and resentment grows in our hearts. We want to get back at that person, somehow to "punish" them and make them feel the hurt they have afflicted.

But St. Paul tells us something different. He tells us to forgive those who have offended us, not to bear a grudge and not to get even. He knows that there is a better way. That way is the path of forgiveness, which takes us to the heart of Jesus' saving death for us. It was after all a great act of forgiveness, because the Lord died for us while we were still sinners (cf. Rom 5:5). He freed us from the chains of eternal death which held us bound in our sins.

So, then, why should we forgive? The biggest reason is this: the

good Lord in his mercy has forgiven us. God does not hold grudges or try to get even when we sin. Rather, he invites us to abandon our sins and gives us the helps to do so, above all in the Sacraments.

And so, we should do likewise. It's not always easy. But it really is the path to happiness. The formula is simple and twofold: know yourself well enough to experience God's forgiveness, and then forgive those who have sinned against you.

This is what we pray for every time we say the Lord's Prayer. Remember the words: "Forgive us our trespasses" – our sins – how? "as we forgive those who trespass against us." We are asking God to forgive us – just as much as we forgive our brothers and sisters and friends.

Trust

When we turn to the Gospel Jesus instructs his disciples about a fundamental attitude they should have as his followers. That attitude is faith or trust in God. And he gives us the yardstick to measure just how authentic our trust really is.

Immediately preceding today's passage is the parable of the rich man who stores up grain in his storehouse to provide for his own future, oblivious to the needs of others.

Here Jesus tells his followers that undue attachment to possessions or things can easily corrupt appreciation of what is most needful, striving for his Kingdom, which God ultimately gives as his gift, "for it is your

Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (cf. Lk 12:31-32).

Jesus nonetheless addresses his disciples' anxieties about being poor and their uncertainty about the future: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life (eternal?) is more than food, and the body more than drink" (Lk 12: 22-23).

This surely reminds us of Jesus himself when the devil tempted him in the desert, and he said to Satan, famished though he was: "man does not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Lk 4:4).

And then Jesus gives examples of God's providential care – not the work of man – extends over his creatures. Yes, God takes care of us more than the birds of the sky, whom he feeds and makes us more beautiful than the lilies in the field. Our lives, our whole lives, are in God's hands. And his hands uphold us; they take care of us. His arms embrace us.

The bottom line is a general principle for the Christian life: "Strive for his Kingdom, and these things will be given you as well" (Lk 12:31).

There is great tenderness in Jesus' words here; he is comforting those whom he calls his "little flock" (Lk 12:32). Their inheritance is the Kingdom, in which the portion of one does not diminish the share of any other. There is no scarcity of goods in the Kingdom!

While we find this lesson of Jesus to be appealing, another part of

our heart says that God does not seem to provide – not always. Think of disasters, sickness, suffering in families and around the world.

Sometimes this causes us to question whether God really does care about us, at least all the time.

But we forget the mission he has entrusted to us as his instruments in the world. What Jesus calls for us is trust that God knows what he is doing, and that he invites us to share in his care of everyone in our common home. We are our brothers' keepers. We are to feed the hungry and clothe the naked – and not just from our surplus. And indeed these are the actions by which we shall be judged (cf. Mt 25:31ff).

Here allow me to read Pope Francis's words about what happens when we rely on ourselves and our wealth and not on God:

A heart troubled by the desire for possessions is a heart full of desire for possessions, but empty of God. That is why Jesus frequently warned the rich, because they greatly risk placing their security in the goods of this world, and security, the final security, is in God. In a heart possessed by wealth, there isn't much room for faith . . . If each of us accumulates not for ourselves alone but for the service of others, in this case, in this act of solidarity, the Providence of God is made visible. If, however, one accumulates only for oneself, what will happen when one is called by God? No one can take his

riches with him, because – as you know – the shroud has no pockets! It is better to share, for we can take with us to Heaven only what we have shared with others.¹

Yet, and here is another qualification, we are to do all this, trusting that God is the one who brings about the results, that we are but his instruments.

Conclusion

And so, dear friends, as we begin this new lunar year let us pray to the Lord with thanksgiving at this Holy Mass for the gifts received and ask for the grace to trust ever more profoundly in his fatherly care for us and to act more in accordance with the demands that places upon us.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

¹ Francis, Angelus (2 March 2014).