

## **Sunday 3-B**

### **Mass Concluding Parish Visitation**

St. Matthew's Church

21 January 2018

Dear Father Tran and dear parishioners and friends of St. Matthew's Parish:

#### ***Introduction***

As many of you know, this past Thursday evening I began a formal pastoral visit of your parish – the second such visit in the Archdiocese of a program which will take at least five years to complete. Father Tran, as Dean of the West Fraser Valley, graciously volunteered St. Matthew's to be included in this year's visitation.

For me, this experience of meeting so many people who are engaged in the life of your parish family, including your wonderful school, has been encouraging. I had the opportunity of visiting with nearly every parish group, listening to their contributions to the parish, picking up tips that I can share with other parishes, and offering my own observations.

Long known as a dynamic community, it seems to me that you are becoming ever more so in your commitment to Jesus and to the mission of evangelization which you have received from him. It has been inspiring to receive your hospitality and to witness first-hand what your parish family, under the wise and zealous guidance of your pastor, is accomplishing for the good Lord: a harvest of spiritual gifts and of good

works that are building up the Body of Christ.

I encourage you to continue to build on your successes, inviting ever more parishioners to share in your many ministries, especially those who are younger and not yet as fully integrated and engaged as those who have found a home here for many years. Above all, I urge you to keep up sharing with others the Good News of which Jesus spoke in today's Gospel.

Allow me to cite from Pope Francis's exhortation "The Joy of the Gospel," where he describes the 21<sup>st</sup> century parish in a way which stresses the importance of its being not only a community of disciples but also of missionaries who go out to others with the Good News. Here's what he wrote:

While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if it [the parish] proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be "the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters." This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed cluster made up of a chosen few. The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable

outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Gospel***

Now I would like to offer a few reflections on just one sentence, one very important sentence, today's Gospel.

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mk 1:15). With these few and concise words, the Evangelist Mark describes the beginning of Jesus' public ministry among the people and at the same time specifies the essential content of his preaching.

So, let's look at what Jesus means by the kingdom of God, the good news or Gospel, and repent. Three simple thoughts to carry with you.

### ***Kingdom of God Has Come Near***

Jesus begins with announcing that the kingdom of God “has come near.” Something previously unheard of is now taking place in this remote corner of the world. God is acting in a new and surprising way.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 28.

His kingdom is drawing near.

What, then, is the kingdom that he is talking about?

It means that God is present now, in the flesh, as Lord in this world. This kingdom is not a place but the situation created when we acknowledge that Jesus Christ, who became flesh, continues to dwell among us in the history of our own lives and in the history of the world. (cf. Jn 1:14).<sup>2</sup> Jesus “announces that in him something new happens: God turns to the human being in an unexpected way, with a unique, tangible closeness, full of love; God is incarnate and enters the human world to take sin upon himself, to conquer evil and usher men and women into the world of God.”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus is not then announcing the coming of a utopia, but he is affirming God’s presence in the here and now, in our world. He “is acting now – this is the hour when God is showing himself in history as its Lord, as the living God, in a way that goes beyond anything seen before.”<sup>4</sup> Whenever the people of the earth recognize God’s Lordship, there is the kingdom.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. St. John Paul II, Homily, Newark (5 October 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, Angelus (26 February 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 55-56.

## ***Repent***

How are we to react to this drawing near of the kingdom? Jesus tells us with just one word, “repent” or “be converted.” To repent means to change the direction of our journey in life. The Lord is not calling us just to make small adjustments in life like “be a little bit nicer” to your spouse and children” – important though that might be! – but to make an about-face. Here to repent means to swim against the tide of a way of life which can make us slaves to some sin or, more often, prisoners of moral mediocrity.

The call to repent entails turning towards Jesus as the Lord and Saviour of your life; to welcome him with personal affection as he walks with you on your path through life. Get to know him. To repent is far more than leaving bad habits or vices behind. It means letting yourself be loved by him, and to be upheld by the power of his grace. Repentance is to make a total “yes” to Jesus, to hand over your whole life to him.

## ***Believe in the Good News***

Jesus explains a little more what he expects of us because the kingdom is near when he says “believe in the good news” or Gospel. Not only must we turn our back on sin, we must turn toward, trust in, believe in the good news.

But what is this “good news”? Is it to accept what is contained in the four Gospels? Not really.

Here the “good news” refers to Jesus himself. He is the Good News who has come when the time was fulfilled. Through him, God is speaking, revealing that he loves us, and that he has entered into our history and into the life of each of us.<sup>5</sup>

Since the “Good News” is Jesus Christ, the message and the messenger are the same. He proclaims the “Good News” not just by what he says or does, but by who he is.<sup>6</sup>

If someone were to ask you what is the core or the heart of the Gospel, what would you say? To love your neighbour as yourself? To do unto others as you would have them do unto you? To keep the commandments? While these follow from believing in the good news, the core of the message, the heart of Jesus is this: “the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead.”<sup>7</sup>

“To believe in the Gospel” is not, therefore, simply to accept what is written in the four Gospels, but to entrust oneself to Jesus, to enter into a personal relationship with him who is alive. Now. In our own

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Meditation during the First Congregation of the 13<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Synod of Bishops (8 October 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 36.

lives. Jesus is the Good News for each one of us personally, individually – and no one is excluded, for Christ died for us while we were still sinners (cf. Rom 5:5).

### ***Conclusion***

We now pass to the celebration of the Eucharist, the summit of your worship as a parish family. Christ's Sacrifice of the Cross and the glory of his Resurrection becomes present for us so that, through Holy Communion, we may be drawn closer into his life and thus share the graces we have received with our brothers and sisters.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB

Archbishop of Vancouver