

## **Easter 5-B**

### **Parish Visit of Sts. Joachim and Ann**

Aldergrove

5 May 2018

Dear Father Ashley, confirmands and those making their First Holy Communion, sponsors, godparents, parents, friends and parishioners of Sts. Joachim and Ann Parish:

#### ***Introduction***

As many of you know, today I have engaged with your parish family in a formal pastoral visit – the sixth such visit in the Archdiocese of a program which will take at least five years to complete. Father Ashley, as Dean of the East Fraser Valley, graciously volunteered Sts. Joachim and Ann to be included in this year’s visitation. And may I take this occasion to express my gratitude to Father for being your shepherd and especially for his attention to the Church’s worship: that it be reverent and beautiful.

For me, this experience of meeting so many people who are committed parishioners has been inspiring and encouraging. I had the opportunity of visiting with nearly every parish group and ministry, listening to their contributions to the community, picking up tips that I can share with other parishes, and offering my own observations.

It has been a real joy to receive your hospitality and to witness first-hand what your parish family, under the 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 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.

In the coming years, and as you are about to welcome a new pastor, I pray that your parish will continue to be ever more in contact with the homes and the lives of its parishioners and never succumb to being a self-absorbed cluster made up of a chosen few. May it always be a place for hearing God's word, for worship and celebration, for growth in the Christian life. and for charitable outreach. Above all, in Pope Francis's words, I pray that "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>

### ***Recipients of First Holy Communion and Confirmation***

And today your parish is celebrating two significant events: the Confirmation of two of its young people and the First Holy Communion of four. What a beautiful occasion this is – and what a reason to give thanks to the good Lord for the blessing of enriching your parish family

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

with these young, but committed, parishioners!

*To Parents*

The young people gathered here today are receiving these Sacrament because you, their parents – above all you parents! – as well as the dedicated teachers in the PREP program, have prepared them so well. For your labours in catechizing and the support of your prayer we are all enormously grateful for your living witness to the faith.

We all need witnesses to the faith. We depend on others to tell us of the love and mercy of God. Without the example and help of those who live their faith, the younger generation cannot be expected to become followers of Christ.

The children here present who will receive Jesus for the first time in Holy Communion or be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit need you, parents and grandparents, godparents and sponsors, friends and parishioners, to bear witness of the Gospel for them: to be examples of the Christian life, so that these young people can grow closer to Jesus as they make their way through life.

I thank you all for taking so seriously the mission you have of passing on the Catholic faith to these, your boys and girls. They can continue to grow and mature only if you create a family atmosphere animated by love, respect and forgiveness.

The Church begins in the family which first presents its children

for Baptism, teaches them to pray and prays with them as well as for them. This is not a responsibility that can be outsourced to others! Dear parents: remember that you are the first – and primary – evangelizers, the bringers of the Gospel to your children. Without you, the faith would not be passed on.

Your task, dear parents, as the primary educators in the faith of your children does not end with First Holy Communion or Confirmation. It is now entering into a new phase that requires your ongoing living of the Catholic life in the family if it is to flourish in your children. Above all, I ask you to see to it that your children meet the Lord in personal prayer in the family and the regular reception of the Sacraments, so that they will grow in love of Jesus. Remind them of the wonder of receiving forgiveness for the sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Teach them to delight in the reception of Jesus in Holy Communion. And always be ready to answer the sometimes difficult questions they pose.

### ***Gospel***

In today's Gospel we hear Jesus' words to his Apostles at the Last Supper. And once more he talks about love. He begins by saying that he is loved by the Father. Before loving us, he is loved! (cf. Jn 15:9).

### ***Being Loved***

Sometimes it is hard for us to accept, indeed to believe, that we are truly loved by God. We get so used to having to please others in order to

be loved – or at least liked. Indeed, our world prompts us to buy, to look good, to be a hero – a thousand of accomplishments – in order to be admired and even loved. This makes it difficult to understand that God’s love for us is very different: it is totally free, gratuitous.

### ***Loving***

Jesus calls us his “friends” (cf. Jn 15:14-15) because he has shared with us everything he has from the Father. The whole sweep of salvation history is all on the table: he has revealed the Father’s plan to us.

Jesus gave his life for his friends: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13). Remember that these “friends” did not understand him. In fact, they abandoned, betrayed and denied him at the crucial moment of his Passion. This tells us just how much Jesus loves us, even though we don’t deserve his love. Jesus loves us in this way!<sup>2</sup>

Friends share their hearts and minds with one another. They want the same things, and always what is good for the other person. Friends walk side by side, their eyes gazing in the same direction, caring about the same things.

### ***Love and Commandment***

Jesus seems to “tie” remaining in his love and friendship to

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Francis, *Regina Caeli* (10 May 2015).

keeping his commandments. In other words, we really can't be his friends if we don't follow what he wants for us – and what he wants is always for our good.

God's commandments (and he was here thinking of the Decalogue and the Washing of the Feet) are NOT arbitrary impositions designed to test our obedience. They are not to be confused with rules of order that might be otherwise.

“There are many small and great actions which obey the Lord's commandment: ‘Love one another as I have loved you’ (cf. Jn 15:12). Small everyday actions, actions of closeness to an elderly person, to a child, to a sick person, to a lonely person, those in difficulty, without a home, without work, an immigrant, a refugee.”<sup>3</sup> Holiness is doing ordinary things with extraordinary love.

### ***Conclusion***

We now proceed to celebrate the Rite of Confirmation, the personal Pentecost of our *confirmandi*.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Francis, *Regina Caeli* (10 May 2015).