

## **Easter 5-B**

### **Archdiocesan CWL Convention**

St. Bernadette

28 April 2018

Dear brother priests, especially Father Tom Smith, spiritual advisor of the CWL in our Archdiocese; dear members of the 57 Councils of the Catholic Women's League gathered for your 95<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention; and dear parishioners: brothers and sisters in the Risen Christ:

#### ***Introduction***

This evening it is a joy to be with you, especially with the CWL of our Archdiocese. The enthusiasm of the CWL for bringing the message of Christ to our hurting world are both an inspiration and a call to the rest of us to open our eyes and our hearts to what the Lord is asking of us today as we struggle to live our faith coherently and joyfully.

You've heard it many times, but it cannot be repeated enough, how much our local Church owes to the 4500 members of the CWL. In the majority of our 78 parishes you are at the centre of parish life: serving on pastoral and finance councils, teaching in our PREP program, and taking a leading role in the various ministries offered by your parish. Your mission statement affirms that you are women "Called to holiness through service to the people of God," and I can certainly affirm that you do just that. On behalf of my brother priests, whom I know back me up on this, I want to thank each and every one of you for living your mission in practice.

It has always been especially gratifying to me that you are willing to be advocates for justice in the public forum, that you are not content simply to serve within the context of your parish family but that you choose to step out of that comfort zone and bring the message of the Gospel to the wider community.

I'm thinking here of your firm stand to promote a culture of life, especially these days through your advocacy of a national strategy for palliative care as an alternative to the mistaken and false "compassion" of those who promote euthanasia and assisted suicide. But I also admire your care for abused women and their children exemplified through the work of Domestic Abuse Services and your very active and effective work to end the scourge of human trafficking. Nor can I forget to mention the programs you are sponsoring to ensure that young women are trained to take their rightful – if often denied – positions of leadership in the Church and society.

It seems to me that you are doing exactly what Pope Francis talks about so frequently: you are going out to the margins, the fringes of society, and treating the Lord Jesus in the suffering of those who are suffering in so many ways. Thank you for being "first responders" in the field hospital of the Church, for living out what we heard St. John write in today's Second Reading: "let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action" (1 Jn 3:18).

## ***1. Abiding***

Today's Gospel reminds us, I believe, of the underlying reason why our good deeds are fruitful in the eyes of the Lord. It tells us that the Christian life, the life of those baptized into the Death and Resurrection of Christ, must be rooted in God.

On the feast of St. Joseph this past March the Holy Father published his latest Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, "Rejoice and Be Glad." In this very readable document he sets, he says, the "modest goal" of re-proposing "the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities. For the Lord has chosen each one of us 'to be holy and blameless before him in love' (Eph 1:4)."<sup>1</sup> The Lord, the Pope reminds us, is addressing each of us personally when he says: "Be holy, for I am holy" (Lev 11:44; cf. 1 Pet 1:16).

And today's Gospel tells us what is at the heart of holiness. It is first of all being united to Jesus, just as a branch is united to the vine.

During the Last Supper, Jesus, knowing that the "hour" of his upcoming death is at hand, shares his heart with his disciples. He wants to impress firmly on them a fundamental truth: that even when he will no longer be physically present with them, they will still be able to

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 2.

remain united to him, but in a new way. To express this reality, this new way of being united to him, Jesus uses the image of the vine and the branches: “Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches” (Jn 15:4-5).

With this image Jesus teaches us that we must “abide” or be united to him. He tells us that we are to “abide” or “live” in him, committed to him, to be that to be living branches attached to him in a living relationship with him, who is the vine. This is holiness.

Jesus is the vine, and through him – like the sap in a tree – the very love of God, the Holy Spirit, is passed to us, the branches. The branches are not self-sufficient, but depend totally on the vine, in which the source of their life is found. So it is with us. Baptism grafts us onto the vine of Christ; we freely receive the gift of new life from him, the gift of what we call “grace.”

Another way of talking about “abiding” with Jesus is to say that we are live in his friendship. We can enter into a personal, intimate relationship with him. Later, at the Last Supper, Jesus himself calls us friends: “You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer . . . but I have called you friends” (Jn 15:14-15). Not just creatures, but friends! “Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of

human existence truly revealed.”<sup>2</sup>

As in any friendship, to be true friends of Jesus, we must want what he wants and, as St. John said in the Second Reading, “obey his commandments and do what pleases him” (1 Jn 3:22).

Friends share what they are thinking, and they want to do the same things. The Lord says this to us elsewhere, as we heard in last Sunday’s Gospel: “I know my own and my own know me” (Jn 10:14). Jesus knows us. We are, for him, an open book: “God knows everything” (1 Jn 3:20). No secrets between friends. He is the Shepherd who calls each of us by name (cf. Jn 10:3). I am not just some nameless being in the near infinity of the universe. He knows me personally.

And we should return that offer of friendship of his by “abiding” with him. The friendship that he bestows freely upon me means that I must try to know him better. How can I do that? By reading his word in the Scriptures, by celebrating the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist, by the silence of my prayer, by seeing him in the people whom I know and meet.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily for the Beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome (24 April 2005): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 17 (27 April 2005), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily (29 June 2011).

## ***Bearing Fruit***

When we are united in friendship with him, we can do so much good for neighbour and society. The fruit of this profound union with Christ is wonderful: our whole person is transformed by the grace of Spirit: soul, understanding, will, affections, and even our body, because we are united body and soul.

We receive a new way of being, the life of Christ becomes our own: we are able to think like him, to act like him, to see the world and the things in it with the eyes of Jesus. And so we are able to love our brothers and sisters, beginning with the poorest and those who suffer the most, as he did and love them with his heart, and so bear good fruit.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus wants grapes from his branches, from us, and perhaps even grapes that will produce good wine.

And he also draws out the consequences for those who bear no fruit: “He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit” (Jn 15:1). The Lord associates the image of the vine with a commission to the disciples, which is mentioned a little later in the Gospel: “I appointed you that you should go out and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide” (Jn 15:16). His first commission to the disciples, to be his friends; that is “to abide” or “remain” with him, is followed by that of an order to set out and do.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Francis, *Regina Caeli* (3 May 2015).

Go out to others! “Called to holiness through service to the People of God.”

***Conclusion***

Let us pray that, as Jesus said to his Apostles may become true for all of us here but especially for the members of the CWL as you conclude your annual convention: go out and “bear much fruit and become my disciples” (Jn 15:8).

We now continue our Eucharist, when our union with Jesus becomes especially intimate as we celebrate his Death and Resurrection for us and he invites us to “holy communion” with him.

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