

Sunday Lent 5:B

Conclusion of the Parish Visit

Holy Spirit Church

18 March 2018

Dear David, and dear parishioners of Holy Spirit Church:

Introduction

As many of you know, yesterday I visited your parish – the fifth such visit in the Archdiocese. Within the next five years or so I hope to make a pastoral of each of our 78 parishes.

For me, this experience of meeting so many people who are engaged in the life of your parish family. During my visit, aside from celebrating the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, I had the pleasure of visiting with nearly every parish group, including your newly formed pastoral team or Pastoral Council, Finance Council, teachers in the PREP program, the lectors, music ministry representatives, the altar servers, the Coordinator of Development and Peace, the recently reconstituted CWL and the Knights of Columbus. I see many of you here this morning and I wish to thank you and Father David for taking the time on a beautiful Saturday to talk with me, your pastor and one another.

We listened to one another. I heard of your contributions to building up the parish, often over many years of dedicated service. And I offered my own observations on certain questions that came up in our discussion. Your love for your parish and your pastor were evident and

inspiring.

My sincere thanks go to all those who organized the visit – and I know that it is always challenging to get so many people to come together.

So many spiritual gifts and good works are present among you. I certainly urge those who are not yet engaged in building up the parish family through involvement in one or more of the its activities and organizations to do so. Everyone has gifts and talents to offer the community. You need the community, but the community also needs you.

Dear parishioners: 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. Welcoming new members to your ministries and planning for the future are necessary if your community is to flourish as the good Lord wishes.

It was pointed out to me in more than one meeting the need of Holy Spirit Parish for a new parish centre to replace the current hall. It is challenging for you to gather together in a place that provides space for the religious education of your children and adults, that allows groups and organizations to meet and for the parish family to come together in fellowship and service. It is my prayer that you will work together – for it is a task that belongs to the whole parish family – to plan for the

facilities that will meet the needs of the growing community of Queensborough. You have a wonderful heritage to build upon, and a new parish centre and rectory will serve you well.

Lastly, I would hope that Holy Spirit Parish will grow ever stronger as a community of disciples who live the Gospel strengthened by the power of the Word of God and nurtured by the Sacraments, and as a community of men and women who go out to others – first of all to their own families – to share this Good News of the love and mercy of God revealed in Jesus’ Death and Resurrection.

Today’s Gospel

From today’s Gospel I want to offer a couple of brief reflections on two ideas that particularly struck me. The first is about the request of some “Greeks” – Jews from who lived outside the Holy Land – “to see Jesus.” And the second is Jesus’ referring to the “death” of the “grain of wheat.” Each of these contains food for thought.

“We wish to see Jesus” (Jn 12:21)¹

Like those “Greeks” in the Gospel who spoke to the Apostle Philip, we too should be moved by a desire “to see Jesus,” to have him accompany us with his presence on our journey through this life to eternal life. By this I mean that you should seek to find the answers to

¹ Cf. St. John Paul II, Message for World Youth Day (2004).

your questions about the meaning of your life with all its joys and suffering in Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Something to remember. In order for us to see Jesus, we first need to let him look at us with his merciful glance. The desire to see Jesus – that is, to know him as a friend and have a personal relationship with him – dwells deep in the heart of each man and each woman. Whether we are aware of it or not, God has created us because he loves us and so that we may love him in return.

I urge you to let this ardent desire to see God as revealed in Jesus emerge from the depth of your hearts. This desire is sometimes, perhaps even often, stifled by the distractions of the world and its fleeting pleasures. But if you give yourselves some prayer in silence, and especially in these last two weeks before Easter, you will have the experience of seeing Jesus, of receiving what he said to his Apostles at the Last Supper: “I no longer call you servants but friends” (cf. Jn 15:15).

Only an encounter with Jesus can give full meaning to our lives. As St. Augustine wrote so long ago, and this remains forever true: “you made us for yourself, [O Lord] and our heart finds no peace until it rests in you.”²

² St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, book 1, chapter 1.

Dear friends, if you learn to discover Jesus in the Eucharist, you will also know how to discover him in your brothers and sisters. The Eucharist received with love enables us to fulfil the commandment to love others as Jesus has loved us. Jesus teaches us to find him in others, first of all in the disfigured face of the poor. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, now St. Teresa of Calcutta, loved to distribute her “visiting card” on which were written the words: “The fruit of silence is prayer; the fruit of prayer is faith, the fruit of faith is love, the fruit of love is service, the fruit of service is peace.” This is the way to see Jesus.

It is not enough to “speak” about Jesus. We must also let him be “seen” somehow through the eloquent witness of our own life.³

We can also “see” Jesus in the sacraments. He refreshes us with Baptism, sends his Spirit in Confirmation, absolves us from our sins in Penance and nourishes us with himself as the Bread of Life in the Eucharist.

“Death” of the Grain of Wheat

My second short reflection centres on Jesus’ saying that “ unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (12: 23-24).

Here Jesus is comparing the “hour” of his Passion and Death to the

³ Cf. St. John Paul II, *Novo millennio ineunte*, 16.

falling into the earth of a grain of wheat. When it falls into the earth the grain must first die to what it was, for there is no other way for it to bear fruit.

Only through the “death” of the “grain of wheat” does his Resurrection come forth, as does the wheat come forth from the grain. If the grain of wheat does not fall into the ground and die it remains single and alone. Nothing happens. But when it falls into the earth and dies, it produces an abundance of fruit. In this way Jesus foretold his own destiny. He himself is the grain of wheat that fell into the earth and died only later to be burst forth in the glorious life of his Resurrection.

Appearances can be deceiving: the small grain seems insignificant. Likewise, in the Crucifixion, everything seems to have failed, but precisely in this way, by falling into the earth and dying, Jesus bore fruit – our salvation – for every time and place.⁴

Through his Cross, through his dying like the grain of wheat, Jesus is telling us that his going away in death is transformed into a coming to us as the Risen Lord who is now forever present to us.⁵ That’s why we can even now “see” him, know him and love. He is the Living Lord, no longer confined to the past.

⁴ Cf. Benedict XVI, Address to the Clergy of Aosta (25 July 2005).

⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily, Easter Vigil (22 March 2008).

Lest we just rest contentedly in Jesus' dying and rising for us, he himself immediately draws a consequence for his disciples: "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also" (Jn 12:26).

Essential to being disciples is walking after the Master, in his footsteps. At all times, but especially during these final days as he approaches Calvary, Jesus invites us to follow him, to accompany him, to share in his Death so that we may be raised up with him.

That Jesus died "for us" does not abolish our need to die "with him," to likewise be like a grain of wheat that goes into the ground to die to one's self so as to be life-giving, to bear fruit, for others. Lent is about learning how to die to oneself – right now: to die to myself, to all that is less than authentically human in me, less than Christlike.

Conclusion

Today's Gospel ends with the striking image of Christ "lifted up from the earth" (Jn 12:32) – like a great standard of victory. This is to "see him" as the grain of wheat fallen into the earth. Commenting on this passage, Pope Benedict wrote:

Brothers and sisters, our gaze is frequently distracted by scattered and passing earthly interests; let us direct our gaze today toward Christ. Let us pause to contemplate his Cross. The Cross is the source of immortal life. . . His nailed arms

are open to each human being and they invite us to draw near to him, certain that he accepts us and clasps us in an embrace of infinite tenderness: “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (Jn 12:32).⁶

Jesus’ Death on the Cross brought forth great fruitfulness. In the Resurrection the dead grain of wheat – a symbol of Christ Crucified – has become for us the Bread of life for the world.⁷

Through this Eucharist Jesus continues to draw the whole world to himself so that his Sacrifice might be celebrated: so that “from the rising of the sun to its setting east to west a perfect offering may be made to the glory of his name.”

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
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⁶ Benedict XVI, Homily after the *Via Crucis* (21 March 2008).

⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, General Audience (14 June 2006).