

Sunday 30-B

Installation of Father William Ashley

St. James, Abbotsford

28 October 2018

Dear Father Ashley, Deacon Alan, and dear brothers and sisters in Christ of St. James Parish:

Introduction

As always on the Day of the Lord, today this community of faith at St. James gathers to give thanks and praise to God by offering the Eucharist, but today also to celebrate the formal installation of your new pastor, Father William Ashley. At this Holy Mass, after the homily, he will formally assume his ministry of serving as your spiritual father and shepherd.

But what does a pastor do, and why is he being installed? First to the last question, why an installation? Is Father Ashley not already your pastor? Indeed, he is. Although the Church does not prescribe a Rite of Installation as canonically necessary, it is a public way for a parish family to recognize and welcome the appointment of its new pastor. Father Bill comes to you to continue the pastoral care, offered so generously and with such dedication by Father George, a compassionate shepherd and to whom I owe my gratitude for his ministry with you.

So, what are the responsibilities of a pastor? What is Father Ashley's mission to you as a community of faith? For what can you hold him accountable?

As pastor, Father is faithfully to celebrate with you and for you the Church's Sacraments, above all by offering Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. He is to proclaim to you forcefully, persuasively and in full fidelity to the mind of the Church the challenge of God's Word as a rivetting "two-edged sword." As your shepherd, he is also called to work with you to build up your parish as a living cell of the Body of Christ by encouraging you to serve one another and the wider community.

He undertakes this mission and responsibility by offering the care of his spiritual fatherhood to all of you. And he will be able to accomplish all this – and I know he will – with the support of your prayers and your spirit of collaboration.

Light from the Gospel: Call to be a Missionary Parish

Now, in light of this morning's Gospel, I would like to say something specific about the call of your Parish to be, as Pope Francis says, to be "completely mission-oriented."¹ What does this mean for St. James Parish? The Holy Father himself provides the answer:

¹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 28.

Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way.” I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities.²

In this light, let’s take a look at the miracle of the healing of the blind beggar which we heard Deacon Alan proclaim in today’s Gospel. The condition of blindness has great significance in the Gospels. The blind represent all those who need the light of faith to walk joyfully on the path of life. The first step in any cure is the need to acknowledge one’s need for light, for help to be rid of blindness.

St. Mark presents Bartimaeus as a model for us. He was not blind from birth, but he had lost his sight (cf. Mk 10:51). He knows his condition, but he has not lost hope. So he seizes the opportunity to encounter Jesus and he entrusts himself to him for healing: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mk 10:47).

When Jesus calls him and asks him with words we all want to hear, “What do you want me to do for you?” Bartimaeus simply replies: “My teacher, let me see again” (Mk 10:51). This blind man represents all those who are aware of their pain and cry out to the Lord, confident of being

² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 33.

healed. His simple and sincere plea is exemplary, and indeed – like that of the publican in the Temple: “God, be merciful to me a sinner” (Lk 18:13) – it has found its way into the tradition of Christian prayer: “have mercy on me.”

In this encounter with Christ, Bartimaeus regains the light he had lost: he gets back onto his feet and resumes the journey. And, from that moment on, has a guide, Jesus; and a path, the same one that Jesus is travelling (cf. Mk 10:52).

The evangelist tells us nothing more about Bartimaeus, but in him he shows us what discipleship is: following Jesus “along the way” (Mk 10: 52), in the light of faith. It was, after all, his faith that made him well (cf. Mk 10:52).

In one of his writings, St. Augustine suggests that Bartimaeus had fallen from a position of prosperity. That’s why he was not just blind but also a beggar.³

This interpretation of Augustine can lead us to reflect on the fact that we can lose precious riches in our lives, and I am not speaking of material riches here. From this perspective, Bartimaeus could represent any individual, family or community which has lost the precious gift of practising the faith they received in Baptism. In such cases the light of

³ Cf. St. Augustine, *On the Consensus of the Evangelists*, 2, 65, 125: PL 34, 1138.

faith has grown dim. They have drifted away from God, no longer considering him relevant to their daily life. Having lost direction, they have become, often unconsciously, beggars looking for meaning in their lives.

Who are they among us? They are the many in our families and even in this Parishes, who need a fresh encounter with Jesus, a re-introduction, or perhaps an introduction for the first time, to a personal relationship with the Lord, who can open their eyes again and teach them the path to follow.

This Gospel passage has something particular to say to this parish as Father Ashley is installed as your pastor. It reminds you of the urgent need to proclaim Christ anew to people and places where the light of faith has grown dim, where the fire of God's love is more like smouldering cinders, crying out to be stirred up into a flame that gives light.

Dear brothers and sisters: on regaining his sight from Jesus, Bartimaeus joined the crowd of disciples, "following Jesus on the way." Like the blind beggar we have each been healed by the Lord in our own way, and so we acquire the new responsibility, even the obligation, to share with others the joy of being healed.⁴

⁴ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily at the Closing of the Synod of Bishops (28 October 2012).

To evangelize effectively, to bring God’s love to others, the parish community of St. James must be willing to step out into its neighbourhood and into the wider society. It cannot be contented with maintenance and serving itself. Remember this. The parish exists for mission. Like Jesus, you are being sent to “seek and save” those who are perishing.⁵

Your purpose is to propose Jesus, the embodiment of God’s saving love and mercy. It is about taking others gently by the hand, making them welcome in the parish family. St. John Paul II once even went so far as to state that the effectiveness of a parish “must be measured in light of this missionary imperative,” which calls us “to come out of ourselves and to share with others the goods we possess, starting with the most precious gift of all – our faith.”⁶

What this sharing demands of parishioners is approachability, a readiness for conversation, patience, warmth and a welcome which is non-judgmental.⁷ Moreover, your message should first of all concentrate on what is most essential, “on what is most beautiful, most grand, most

⁵ Cf. James Mallon, *Divine Renovation* (Toronto: Novalis, 2014), 17,18.

⁶ St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 49.

⁷ Cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 165.

appealing and at the same time most necessary.”⁸ And what is that? The saving Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ for sinners. Begin by leading others to trusting in God and his love as manifested in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

What, then, is the challenge I am suggesting to you? To be a dynamic parish of disciples who understand and accept the sacred mission of evangelization entrusted to them.

We now turn to the Rite of Installation in which it becomes clear that a pastor after the Lord’s heart accompanies his parishioners with his ministry from Baptism until death.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

⁸ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 35.