

Lunar New Year

St. Matthew's Church

17 February 2018

Dear Father Tran and brother priests; and dear friends in Christ who have gathered for this Mass of Thanksgiving:

Introduction

The Lord God is inviting all of us this morning to a prayer of thanksgiving. It is a real joy for me to be with you, the vibrant Vietnamese community, to celebrate this Holy Mass, as the Asian community in the Lower Mainland joins hundreds of millions of people around the world in marking the beginning of a new lunar new year.

You are blessed to celebrate three new years.

Like all Catholics, we began the Church's year, the liturgical year, with Advent, preparing for the coming of Christ, his birth, his ministry of teaching and healing, and then his passion, death, resurrection, ascension into heaven and sending of the Spirit. We do this year after year – as we follow the life of Jesus. This liturgical year is really the most important, for its celebration through the weeks of the year marks the journey we are all on in our pilgrimage to heaven.

Along with most of the world's inhabitants, we likewise celebrated the beginning of the civil year on January 1, though for us Catholics it is also the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. But even this civil new year contains within it a "memory" of our civilization's Christian roots. Sometimes we place "A.D" after the year. This "A.D." means, in Latin,

“Anno Domini” – in the year of Our Lord. While most people don’t think much about it, this affirms before the world that we are now living in the 2,018th year after the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

So, that’s two new years. But today we are celebrating the Lunar New Year, an ancient way of marking the cycle of time that is found in the great cultures of Asia. As I see it, the Vietnamese community is three times blessed!

And that means you have many reasons for giving thanks to the good Lord for all that he has given to you. I want to recall just two of those reasons: your family and your faith.

Thanksgiving for the Gift of Family

Just think. You didn’t have to be born, to be given life. God loved you into life. Through the love of your parents, he created you.

And so, at the beginning of this lunar new year, we give thanks for our parents and family and for all our ancestors, as we heard in the Old Testament reading from the Book of Sirach: “Let us now sing the praises of famous men [and women], our ancestors in their generations” (Sir 44:1). Today we remember them with great affection, for we are their heritage, their wealth and their glory (cf. Sir 44:11,13). Let us never forget their wisdom and all that they have taught us. And let us never forget that the Saints are waiting for us to join them in the glory of Heaven.

Just being born into a family is therefore a great grace. That's the first reason to be thankful – to God and to your family.

In the Second Reading, from the New Testament, St. Paul gives us an instruction on how to make family life happy. First, he tells children – and not just young children but grown-up children as well – to honour their parents, so that all will go well with them and that they may have a long life (cf. Eph 6:2-3).

And second, he tells parents not to provoke their children, not to make them angry but to raise them in the teaching and discipline which we have from the Lord (cf. Eph 6:4).

One of the things children need to learn from their parents is not to get carried away by anger. A child who does something wrong must be corrected, but never treated as someone on whom parents take out their own frustrations. Adults also need to realize that some kinds of misbehaviour by their children have to do with the limitations typical of the young. In correcting their children's faults, parents have to be careful not to cause them to become discouraged or resentful. That's why the Apostle Paul says, "Parents, do not provoke your children" (Eph 6:4).¹

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has some good advice to give us on how to maintain a happy, Christian family:

¹ Cf. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 269.

My advice is never to let the day end without making peace in the family. And how am I going to make peace? By getting down on my knees? No! Just by a small gesture, a little something, and harmony within your family will be restored. Just a little caress, no words are necessary. But do not let the day end without making peace in your family.²

Thanksgiving for the Gift of Faith

Besides our families and our ancestors, there is another reason for giving thanks to God today. The Gospel passage we heard proclaimed gives us the reason why.

Zechariah, the father of St. John the Baptist, cries out after his son's birth: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty Saviour for us . . . that we might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days" (Lk 1:68-69, 74-75).

Yes, God has sent us a Saviour, Jesus Christ, who has saved us from our sins and brought us new life.

He has given us the gift of a "new birth" – the one that comes from Baptism. In this Sacrament God strengthens his bond with us, bringing you into an even bigger family than that of our ancestors or parents.

² Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 104.

He makes us members of the Church. We have another home. And in this home, his community of disciples, he gives us the Sacraments and the Word of God, so that we might become holy.

For most of us, our entry into the Church through Baptism was because our parents brought us to the font. They not only gave us life, but placed us in God's hands so that he could give us a re-birth to eternal life!

Our faith is a great gift for it enables us to live in hope, casting aside the discouragement that can afflict us. Faith allows us to “see things as Jesus himself sees them, with his own eyes: it is a participation in his way of seeing.”³

Conclusion

And so, dear friends, as we begin this new lunar year let us pray to the Lord with thanksgiving at this Holy Mass for the gifts of family and faith we have received and let us ask for the grace to build our families ever more firmly on the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who died and rose for us – and who comes to us now in this Eucharist.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

³ Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 18.