

Saturday 21- B

Western Canada Chinese Living Camp

31 August 2018

Dear Father and friends in Christ:

Introduction

It's always a pleasure to be with you who are enjoying and benefiting from your experience of the Western Canada Chinese Living Camp. For me to be with a group of young adults who are enthusiastic for the Gospel and are striving to live in friendship with the Lord Jesus in their daily life is both inspiring and exhilarating.

I know that often the path you are on is a difficult one. Probably – but I'm only guessing here – many of your friends and colleagues do not understand your determination to place your trust in Jesus and his word. They might even ridicule you or make snide and unkind comments. And the recent revelations of clerical sexual abuse no doubt make you even more of a target of such remarks. Our heart must go out to the victims and survivors of this abuse, and we must be resolute in calling to account all those who were responsible for covering up this abuse or who failed to act so as to protect the vulnerable. And we must do all in our power to ensure that such horrors are never repeated.

Many of you must be not only disappointed and even disgusted. And rightly so. But that disappointment should be directed at those responsible, and to the Lord. While certainly perpetrators of abuse and those who hid it pushed Jesus aside, he has not left our side.

Through all the darkness, I find it helpful to recall Peter's answer to Jesus which we heard in last Sunday's Gospel. Jesus insisted that he was the living Bread from heaven and that his flesh was true food and his blood real drink given for the life of the world. Outraged, many of those who had been following him walked away. But, on behalf of the Twelve, Peter piped up: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You [alone] have the words of eternal life."

How true this is! In times of trial, we need the Lord Jesus more than ever; and we need to recall his words to Peter, speaking about the Church, "and the gates of hell will not prevail against it"; and to his Apostles, don't forget what Jesus said to them before his Ascension into heaven: "I am with you all days, even to the end of the world."

Today's Gospel

Today's Gospel is not about the need for shrewdness or the value of competitive capitalism by investing wisely and prudently. It is about the way in which we respond to God's call. St. Paul reminds us, as he did the Corinthians, in the First Reading: "Consider your own call, brothers and sisters" (1 Cor 1:26).

What does he mean? I think he is asking us to reflect on the call each one of us received in Baptism: to be united with Christ, to know that being his disciples is intentional; it is on-going throughout life and often difficult. "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a

lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Saint John's Gospel describes that event in these words: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should ... have eternal life' (3:16)."¹

The text speaks of "a man going on a journey [who] called his slaves and entrusted his property to them" (Mt 25:14). He leaves no instructions but distributes vast sums of money to each "according to his ability" (Mt 25:15); that is, in a very personalized fashion.

The First Two Slaves

Upon returning the master asks what happened to his money. After identical recitations about doubling the gift, each of the first two is called "a good and trustworthy slave" and is, consequently, placed in charge of even more possessions and welcomed into the joy of the master.

The talents each one of us receives – and we all have "talents" – are gifts, not achievements. And they are different, measured out according to what each person needs for their fulfillment, for their share in the "life in abundance" that Jesus has come to give us (cf. Jn 10:10). Even if the world holds some gifts or talents as worth more in terms of prestige, power or wealth, God acknowledges them equally. Every gift

¹ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 1.

he gives is precious, is to be accepted with gratitude, and to be used for the benefit of others. If we do this, God brings forth fruitfulness from our talents. He multiplies them.

The Third Slave

The third servant is not a multiplier. He digs a hole in the ground and buries his one talent. Why does he do that? Because he is afraid he is going to lose it if he trades with it or invests it. He takes no risk. He must have reasoned like this: “Well, those with more talents can afford to take a risk. If they lost a talent, they could make it up later. But me, I have only one talent. If I lose it, end of story! So I better play it safe and just take care of it.”

That’s why he says upon the master’s return, this same servant explained to him the reason for this action, saying: “Master, I knew you to be a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground” (Mt 25:24-25). This servant did not have a trusting relationship with his master, but was afraid of him, and that fear hindered him in trusting the master.

Fear always immobilizes us and often leads to making bad choices. Fear discourages us from taking the initiative in working for others and for God. It induces us to take refuge in secure and guaranteed solutions, and thus end up not accomplishing anything at all. As Pope Francis says,

“To move forward and grow on the journey of life, we must not have fear; we must have faith.”²

We must be willing to risk. That’s what Christians do at the most gut level. We commit ourselves to one we cannot see. We look at the Cross on which hangs a criminal and say, “My Lord and my God.” We believe before understand. We do not understand or have assurance and then believe.

Jesus does not ask us to store his grace – the gifts he has given us – in a safe! On the contrary, he wants us to use our gifts to benefit others. We are to expend them, use them, multiply them.

Think of it this way. It’s as if Jesus were to tell us: “Here is my mercy, my tenderness, my forgiveness: take them and make ample use of them.” “And what have we done with them? Whom have we ‘infected’ with our faith? How many people have we encouraged with our hope? How much love have we shared with our neighbour? These are questions that will do us good to ask ourselves.”³

This parable also helps us understand how important it is to have a true understanding of just who God is. We must not think that he is a cruel, hard and severe master who wishes to punish us. If we have such a

² Francis, Angelus (19 November 2017).

³ Francis, Angelus (16 November 2014).

mistaken image of God, our life – like that of the third slave – cannot be fruitful. If we live in fear, this will prevent us from doing anything constructive. Beware of fear! Fear paralyzes us; it causes our self-destruction.

And so, today remember who God revealed himself to be. Already in the Old Testament he revealed himself as “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ex 34:6). And Jesus always showed us that God is not a severe or intolerant master, but a father full of love, of tenderness, a father full of goodness. That’s why we can and must have immense faith in him.⁴

More than ever, I believe, this time – your time – is one in which you are being called to bring to fruition the gifts the good Lord has so generously given you to serve him, the Church and others. In particular, in this period of crisis, it is vitally important that you not hide your talents in shame or embarrassment, that you not turn in on yourselves, but, rather that you open ourselves to the work and vocation the good Lord has in mind for you. Listen to the wise words of Francis:

⁴ Cf. Francis, Angelus (19 November 2017).

. . . I ask you who are just setting out on your journey through life: have you thought about the talents that God has given you? Have you thought of how you can put them at the service of others? Do not bury your talents! Set your stakes on great ideals, the ideals that enlarge the heart, the ideals of service that make your talents fruitful. Life is not given to us to be jealously guarded for ourselves, but is given to us so that we may give it in turn. Dear young people, have a deep spirit! Do not be afraid to dream of great things!⁵

Conclusion

God has blessed you with life, and with talents and gifts meant just for you. Through are the instruments, the tools he has given you to serve him and his people.

Let us pray during this Eucharist that each of us will recognize the call we have received from God, that he loves us and holds us in the palm of his hand, that he has given us a share in his riches, especially by calling us to life through the Catholic Church. Through the intercession of Mary, whose whole life was given to love of her Lord and her neighbour, we ask that we will understand that the talents we have each received are gifts for others and that we are called to love as we have

⁵ Francis, General Audience (24 April 2013).

been loved.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver