

Sunday 27 B

Parish Visit

Our Lady of Good Counsel

7 October 2018

Dear brother priests – Father John, Father George, Father Junji, Father Jan – and dear parishioners and friends in Christ:

Introduction

As many of you know, this past Thursday evening I began a formal visit of your parish and it concludes this morning.

For me, the experience of meeting so many people who are engaged in the life of your parish family, including the teachers and students of your outstanding school, gives concrete witness that your community is flourishing under the guidance of the Salesian priests who are your good shepherds. Indeed, the family spirit of Don Bosco, with his emphasis on the importance of working with youth and the poor, gives your parish a special “feel,” unlike any of the other 78 parishes in the Archdiocese.

During the past few days I have had the pleasure of praying with the community: with the school children on Friday at their School Mass; yesterday morning at a Mass where several hundred received the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick; and last night at Mass with the Hispanic community which has had its home here at OLGC for a generation.

Most of the time, however, I spent visiting with nearly every parish

group, and there are so many of them. There are hundreds of parishioners of all ages engaged in one ministry or another. They are too many for me to list here. During these meetings we listened to one another. I heard of their contributions to building up the parish, often over many years of dedicated service. I picked up tips on how you carry out your mission as disciples of Jesus, practices and ways of going about things that I can share with other parishes. And I offered my own observations on certain questions that came up in our discussion.

I am enormously grateful to the wonderful hospitality offered, to all those who organized the visit – always a challenging chore to get so many people together – and to those of you who took the time to come together. I thank you most sincerely.

There are countless spiritual gifts and good works present among you, and for this we should give the Lord thanks for such abundance. Let me urge everyone who comes to Mass here at OLGCC to become engaged in building up the Body of Christ through your active involvement in one or more of the parish activities and organizations.

Dear parishioners: continue to build on your successes, inviting an increasing number of your brothers and sisters to share in your many ministries, especially those who are of the younger generation and not yet as fully involved in parish life as those who have found a home here

for many years. Welcoming new members to your organizations and planning on succession – who will take my place? – are necessary for a community to flourish as the Lord wishes.

Lastly, I would like to share with you an observation from Pope Francis when he describes his expectations of what a parish should be concentrating on today. As you know, he speaks often of the Church as a field hospital where we treat the wounded. Parishioners are first-responders who must go out into the field to pick up and bring to the field hospital of the parish those who may have strayed from the practice of the faith or do not yet know God's love and mercy.

Allow me to cite from Pope Francis's exhortation "The Joy of the Gospel," where he describes the 21st century parish in a way which stresses its role as a community of disciples who live the Gospel and a community of missionaries who go out to others to share this Good News. Here's what he wrote:

"The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers.

It is . . . a centre of constant missionary outreach.¹

Today's Readings

Now let's turn for a moment to reflect on what the Scriptures are telling us today about God's loving plan of salvation.

Our first reading tells us that God was pained by Adam's loneliness. He said: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as a partner" (Gen 2:18). From God's Word and our experience we know that nothing makes a person's heart as happy as another heart like their own, a heart which loves and takes away the sense of being alone. God made men and women for happiness, to share their journey with someone who complements them, to live the wondrous experience of love: to love and to be loved, and to see their love bear fruit in children.

To a question posed by the Pharisees – probably asked as a trap to make him unpopular with the crowd, which practiced divorce as an established fact – Jesus responds in a straightforward way. He brings everything back to the beginning of creation, to God's plan for his beloved creation: "But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they

¹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 28.

are no longer two but one flesh” (Mk 10:6-8; cf. Gen 1:27; 2:24).

God himself blesses the human love of marriage. It is he who joins the hearts of two people. It is he who joins them together and does so in a way which mirrors his own faithful and unbreakable love. That’s why he says, “what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (Mk 10:9).

In Canadian society, where divorce is not just taken for granted but held to be a good thing when the going gets tough, the Church is called to bear witness, in fidelity to Christ her Teacher, to marriage as an unbreakable bond, “as a sign of God’s grace and of the human person’s ability to love seriously.”²

Under the Mosaic Law, divorce was allowed, but only permitted because of the peoples’ “hardness of heart” (Mk 10:5). It was not part of God’s original plan, which Jesus restores. Now, with the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage, man and woman are empowered to live together for life, “in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, til death do us part.”

The bond of marriage is like the bond or covenant of love that God makes with us, his people. It is not temporary, but permanent and unbreakable. Likewise, marriage is incompatible with divorce because

² Francis, Homily for the Opening of the Synod of Bishops (4 October 2015).

the love of man and woman mirrors Christ's love for his Church, which cannot be broken.

When serious difficulties arise in marriage, we do not point our fingers in judgment of others, but are called to remember that the Church is a "field hospital" which has the duty, like a mother, to seek out and care for hurting couples who knock in search of help and support. Let's always remember that Jesus also said: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mk 2:17).³

Saint John Paul II once said: "Error and evil must always be condemned and opposed; but the man who falls or who errs must be understood and loved."⁴

In the Word of God today the Lord is telling us that the goal of married life is not simply to live together for life, though it does say that, but to love one another for life – as Jesus loves us, his Church!

Conclusion

Let us pray that, on this day which is also the feast of Our Lady of

³ Cf. Francis, Homily for the Opening of the Synod of Bishops (4 October 2015).

⁴ St. John Paul II, Address to the Members of Italian Catholic Action (30 December 1978).

the Holy Rosary, patroness of our Archdiocese, Mary, Help of Christians, will accompany husbands and wives on their journey through life! Amen.

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