

Sunday Lent 2:B

Conclusion of the Parish Visit

St. Andrew's Church

25 February 2018

Dear Father Wilfred, Father Joseph and dear parishioners of St.

Andrew's Parish:

Introduction

As many of you know, this past Thursday evening I began a formal visit of your parish – the fourth such visit in the Archdiocese of a program which will take at least five years to complete.

For me, this experience of meeting so many people who are engaged in the life of your parish family, including your wonderful school, has been extraordinarily encouraging. May I say here what a treasure you have in St. Andrew's School. It is a great blessing to have such an educational community in your parish, and I urge every family to do everything possible to enroll their children in this school. Moreover, your desire for a new school deserves the highest commendation.

During my visit, aside from celebrating Mass with the school children, I had the pleasure of visiting with nearly every parish group, and I see many of you here this morning at this Mass. 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 parish life that I can share with other parishes. And I offered my own observations on

certain questions that came up in discussion.

Gratitude for the wonderful hospitality fills my heart. 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.

Long known as a dynamic community, from all that I can gather, the St. Andrew's parish family is becoming ever more so in its commitment to Jesus and helping parishioners draw closer to him.

It has also been inspiring to witness first-hand what your parish family, under the wise and zealous guidance of your pastor and his assistant, is accomplishing for the good Lord and his Church. So many spiritual gifts and good works are present among you. I certainly urge those who are not yet engaged in building up the Body of Christ through involvement in one or more of the parish activities and organizations to do so. Everyone has gifts and talents to offer the community.

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 involved 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.

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 urge. Parishioners are first-responders who must go out into the field to pick up and bring to the hospital those who are in need – in need of the healing that only the Lord can give.

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 the importance of this family being both a community of disciples who live the Gospel and a community of missionaries who go out to others with this Good News. Here’s what he wrote:

While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if it [the parish] proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be “the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.” This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed cluster made up of a chosen few. 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 community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach.¹

Gospel of the Transfiguration

Today, in the Gospel, Jesus takes us up to a high mountain, a place of God's special closeness to his people, like Mount Sinai where he gave Moses the Ten Commandments, the Mount of the Beatitudes where Jesus proclaimed the Sermon on the Mount, or the hill of Calvary where he died for us.

Up on the mountain of the Transfiguration Jesus revealed to three chosen disciples who he really is: the eternal Son of God. Two things strike me in this account: the radiance which envelopes Jesus and the voice of the Father from the cloud.

Light

For our senses, the light of the sun is the brightest light known in nature, but the account tells us that “the disciples briefly glimpsed an even more intense splendour, that of the divine glory of Jesus.”²

He is surrounded by blinding light. “Jesus wants this light to illuminate their hearts when they pass through the thick darkness of his

¹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 28.

² Benedict XVI, Angelus (20 March 2011).

Passion and death, when the folly of the Cross becomes unbearable to them.”³

The Transfiguration is, then, a moment of light in advance of the Crucifixion. It helps all of us see Christ’s Passion, which we meditate especially during Lent, with the gaze of faith. We glimpse – even us now in our mortal life – that the Passion, which we share on a daily basis in the trials of life, opens for us the door to the Resurrection.⁴

Transfigured on Mount Tabor, Jesus wanted to show where the darkness of the Cross ultimately leads, to encourage them to see the Resurrection that lay ahead.

So it is for us. Those who die with Jesus, shall rise again with Jesus. Whoever struggles alongside him will triumph with him. This is the message of hope contained in Jesus’ Cross and is revealed here on the mountain.⁵

Voice: “Listen to Him”

But something else also occurs on the mountain. The voice of the Father speaks from above, proclaiming Jesus as his beloved Son, saying: “This is my Son, the Beloved, Listen to him” (Mk 9:7).

³ Benedict XVI, Angelus (4 March 2012).

⁴ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily (4 March 2012).

⁵ Cf. Francis, Angelus (12 March 2017).

These words are so important! Our Father says to these Apostles and to us too: “Listen to Jesus, because he is my beloved Son.” He says this to you, to everyone!

We, the followers and disciples of Jesus, are called to be a people who listen to God’s voice and take his words with the utmost seriousness. But to hear what Jesus is really saying, we must get close to him, to follow him, as the crowds in the Gospel did who walked the roads of Palestine.

It is our duty as Christians – but also an enormous privilege – is to listen to the Word of God, to listen to Jesus, because he speaks to us, as one friend speaks to another – and we are his friends! (cf. Jn 15:15).⁶

We need to take the time every day to go up the mountain with Jesus; that is, we need to find a place of silence, a place of prayer, so as to hear his voice. What is he saying to you?

Listen to him first of all in your heart. But also listen to Jesus in his written Word, in the Gospels. What more nourishing soul could there be, what better guidance and what greater consolation than the very Word of God contained in the four Gospels?

Conclusion

Dear friends. Continue to live the teaching of Jesus in this beautiful

⁶ Cf. Francis, Homily (16 March 2014).

parish of St. Andrew's. By God's grace, you are living with joy and zeal the Gospel which you have received from the Lord Jesus.

As we now begin the Liturgy of the Eucharist, let us pray with gratitude all that God has done for this parish family and ask him to strengthen our resolve to live as missionary disciples in a world which needs the light of Jesus and God's Word so that it will come to know the fullness of life our Saviour came to give us (cf. Jn 10:10).

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