

Sunday: Ordinary 29 B

Parish Visit of St. Francis de Sales

St. Francis de Sales

20/21 October 2018

Dear Father Smith, Father Egirious, dear parishioners and friends in Christ:

Parish Visit

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

For me, the experience of meeting so many people who are engaged in the life of your parish family gives concrete witness that your community is flourishing under the shepherding guidance of your pastor, Father Tom, and his assistant, Father Tomson, and the wonderful staff who support them and all parishioners.

During the past few days I have spent most of the time visiting with nearly every parish group. Here hundreds of parishioners of all ages are involved in one ministry or another. 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.

At the end of my visit I will send Father Smith a report, but let me

note just a few things this evening/morning.

First of all, you are blessed to have an outstanding school within your parish. I say “within” because it is not accurate, really, to speak of the “parish” and the “school” as two separate institutions. Yes, there are two buildings, a school and a church. But the school is integral to the parish community as the privileged, though not the only, place for the education of your children. And your school is flourishing because of the extraordinary way in which it is carrying out its mission, with the help of a superb Parish Education Committee, as an evangelizing community which fosters in the children a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Secondly, I am so impressed, indeed inspired, by your initiatives to foster that relationship in PREP and RCIA, bible study and prayer groups, including one for young mothers, Catholic disciples Alpha for youth, Liturgical of the Word for Children and many others. The service to the parish community is carried out by many, many volunteers on the Pastoral Council, the Finance Council, the newly established Parish Planning Committee which is thinking ahead about needed new facilities, the Evangelizing Committee, and those who foster adult faith formation. Also my admiration extends to the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Lectors, ushers, greeters, liturgical and music ministers, altar servers, Couples for Christ, CWL, Knights of Columbus.

Those who serve the poor, the refugees, the sick and those in health-care facilities are truly serving Jesus whom they encounter in those to whom they minister.

I am also 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 St. Francis de Sales to become even more engaged in building up the Body of Christ through your active involvement in one or more of the parish activities and organizations. If you have remained a little on the side-lines, give serious thought to finding a ministry where the Lord can use your gifts and talents for his service.

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

Be missionary disciples in the heart of Burnaby!

¹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 28.

Today's Gospel

The Gospel we have just heard proclaimed offers us a profound lesson on what it really means to be a follower of Jesus and not just a hanger-on to words of divine comfort and consolation.

Disciples Are Called to Share in Christ's Suffering

In the verses just preceding today's Gospel account Jesus predicted his upcoming Passion, Death and Resurrection. He laid out very clearly for his Apostles how he foresaw his future destiny: he was to fulfil the mission entrusted to him by the Father by giving himself totally, through his death, for the salvation of others.

Then, in profound contrast to this, comes the scene of the two sons of Zebedee, James and John. They still have other ideas in mind about what it means to be counted among Jesus' followers.

They rush up to Jesus and say bluntly and with childlike confidence, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you" (Mk 10:35).

It is not difficult to see ourselves in their request. Do we all not often ask the Lord to do what *we* want? Is that not frequently the content of our prayers? "Please, Lord, grant me this or give me that."

And the Lord, with his patience no doubt tried at their lack of understanding of his teaching, nonetheless does not rebuke his disciples – just as he does not turn back our prayers of pleading. To their

somewhat impertinent question he kindly replies: “What is it you want me to do for you?” (Mk 10:36).

Their answer? Some benefit for all the Apostles? Perhaps food for the multitude? New and better boats for increasing their catch of fish? More strength to go out preaching on the highways and byways? None of these. Instead they ask a favour for themselves – privilege, honour and prestige. “Grant us to sit,” they say, “one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory” (Mk 10:37).

The Apostles overlooked or didn’t understanding the suffering Jesus had spoken about moments before (cf. Mk 10:33-34). They still thought of him as a King who would bring them glory. Jesus responds that they don’t know what they are asking for: “You do not know what you are asking” (Mk 10:38).

Jesus had to spell it out for them: what it really meant to with him “in glory.” And it wasn’t what they had anticipated. They would have to drink from his cup. What Jesus means here is crystal clear: the cup he is referring to is that of the Passion, which he accepts as doing the will of his Father; that is, the cup of suffering.

But, since they asked, Jesus answers. Like him, James and John would have to be “baptized” or washed in blood. And so they would be at a later time, since they came to a martyr’s death.

It is important to see in this dialogue how Jesus treats his disciples

with gentleness at the same time that he leads them to a deeper understanding of who he is and what it really means to follow him. He wants us to be aware of the consequences of this choice. It all comes down to this: to be associated with Jesus, to be his friend, disciple or follower entails imitating his life, a willingness to share in his destiny.

Once again we have the lesson or, better, the truth of the Cross. Our sufferings, disappointments, sadness are not merely useless experiences without meaning. They are for us the path to life. They become bearable when we consciously share them with the Lord.

Conclusion

And now, as we continue this Mass, let us ask the Lord to continue to bless your beautiful parish family, and also to be with each one of us as we strive to imitate the Lord so that, like him, we are willing to give our life for others, whatever form that “giving” might take.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver