

# **23rd Sunday C; Installation of Father Mark Bialek; St. John the Evangelist, Westminster**

## **I. Introduction**

A. As it happens, Father Bialek is being installed on the same weekend when Pope Francis canonizes Mother Teresa of Calcutta, even as Hurricane Hermine also presses down upon the Atlantic seacoast. As it also happens, the Church provides us with a Gospel reading appropriate to both of these events - a saint and storm. In turn, these events help us understand what we do here this evening in formally inaugurating Father Bialek's service as your pastor.

B. Hoping that I have intrigued rather than confused you, let me hasten to explain how a saint, a storm and a new pastor fit together, not just in our heads but also in our hearts!

## **II. The Mission of the Parish**

A. Let's begin by considering the mission of your parish. St. John's is a wonderful parish with a beautiful church, a school that teaches the faith and builds character while offering its students a truly excellent course of studies. St. John's has a large religious education program, resources for adult faith-formation, outreach for the poor and the unborn, and many forms of pastoral help for individuals and families, as well as ministry for young people and young adults. St. John's parish family also includes a large Latino community and many, many opportunities for growth in the coming years.

B. As parishioners you come to your parish for many reasons: the spiritual nourishment of the Word of God and the Eucharist; for the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God and others; for first communions, confirmations, weddings, and funerals; for strength in time of illness, consolation in time of sorrow, advice in

time of confusion, for the strengthening of marriages and families, for the education and formation of your children – for God’s grace in all the important even critical moments of life. A parish also functions as a social focal point for the community, a place where parishioners and guests gather as friends. – Yes, there are many reasons why parishioners come to a parish and it is the pastor’s job to lead & coordinate all ministries & activities of the parish. In that sense, the pastor’s job description could be endless and daunting, even with the teamwork of excellent priests and deacons, a wonderful staff, and the dedicated leadership and service of so many parishioners. In fact, the mission is so endless and so daunting that a pastor and his parishioners at times might be unable to see the forest for the trees...that is to say, the big picture. This is where the Gospel, Mother Teresa, and Hurricane Hermine come in....

### **III. Only All for God and Jesus**

A. For in fact, the real mission of the parish is bring us all to a point in our lives where we can be as Mother Teresa was, “only all for God and Jesus!” Its real mission is to cut through the distractions and worries of our busy lives and lead us to a point where absolutely nothing matters more than our love for the Lord Jesus and our readiness to follow him. This is what Jesus means when he says that we can’t be his followers without hating our loved ones... he’s telling us in startling terms the he is more important than the very things and people we hold nearest and dearest ... whether it’s our spouse, our children, our siblings, our jobs, our possessions – Jesus insinuates himself into our every aspect of our lives, demanding top billing.

B. Jesus wants to make his way into our hearts because he loves us, more than we know, and when we love him in return we find true happiness and a renewed capacity to love others, especially those in need. Everything a parish does, every activity, every ministry, must have as its goal bringing about in our lives a living encounter with the Lord who loves us so – Of course, the Lord is present to us in Word and Sacrament but often it is we ourselves who are absent or distant from the Lord. So the pastor and his co-workers walk with you and you walk with one another toward this living encounter with Christ, opening your hearts to him in love, knowing that once you fall deeply in love with the Lord everything changes – as it did for Mother Teresa, as it did for every saint who ever lived. Once we have

encountered the Lord in a deep and personal way, then the things we once thought important become less important and the persons we overlooked because we thought they didn't measure up, suddenly become very important in our lives...including the poor and vulnerable. This is precisely what happened in Mother Teresa's life and it can also happen in ours!

## **IV. Picking Up the Cross**

A. ...but not easily: Jesus tells us we must pick up our Cross so as to follow him. The Cross runs counter to human wisdom - Paul speaks of "the folly of the Cross" telling us, in accord with our first reading from the Book of Wisdom that God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom. And here is where Hurricane Hermine comes in - for, try as we might we cannot avoid the storms and upheavals of life; try as we might we cannot create for ourselves a life free of pain. And anything we want to do that is worthwhile demands that we sacrifice time, money, possessions, and pleasure. So let us not be surprised that our deepest encounter with Jesus often takes place in suffering, in those moments when the illusion of self-sufficiency is stripped away and the folly of misplaced priorities becomes clear.

B. The parish is not only our haven when the storms of life are fierce; it is also a place where we make sense of suffering and indeed use it to draw close to Jesus, to share in his Cross, and to reproduce in our lives the self-giving love of the Cross. That is why Mother Teresa once said that "suffering in and of itself is useless but suffering which is a share in the Passion of Christ is a marvelous gift..." a "gift of love" by which our sins are forgiven and our love for others purified. How many times as a priest have I been edified, even overwhelmed by the smile of a person who cheerfully underwent sufferings for love of Christ.

C. So, in this moment of hope and joy, let us pray for Father Bialek as he begins serving you as pastor, even as we rededicate ourselves to the fundamental mission of this parish - to proclaim Christ, to encounter Christ, to walk with others, to spread the Gospel, reaching out to those who don't practice the faith or who have no faith, reaching out in love to the poor and suffering in our midst. Through the intercession of St. Mother Teresa and St. John the Evangelist, may this parish continue to grow as a community of faith, worship, and service, now and for many,

many years to come. May God bless you and keep you always in his love!