

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 4th Sunday of Easter; Mother's Day

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St. Ambrose Parish, Baltimore

May 12, 2019

A Building and More Than a Building

In 2006, St. Ambrose celebrated its 100th anniversary and today we celebrate the 90th anniversary of this beautiful Gothic church which was completed in 1929 during the pastorate of Msgr. Hugh Monahan, and dedicated by Archbishop Michael J. Curley, then Archbishop of Baltimore. In and of itself, this church is a remarkable architectural achievement and it remains a landmark in the Park Heights neighborhood.

But we are celebrating more than architecture and more than a landmark. We've gathered to give thanks to God for our spiritual home — a place of blessing and peace, a place where we come together to hear God's Word, to celebrate his powerful Presence in the Mass and Sacraments, a place where gather as a community, the Body of Christ, to come to know and love one another, to care for one another as sisters and brothers. St. Ambrose is where we support one another in living the faith amid life's challenges, while, at the same time, keeping our eyes fixed on our eternal home, which is heaven. As we read in the Book of Revelation, heaven is where we hope one day to gather with people from every race, nation, and tongue in joyful worship before the Throne of the Lamb, the Lamb of God, who was slain for our salvation.

Yes, St. Ambrose is our spiritual home but it is home that is open to all. It is a place of welcome, an entry point for many into the Church's faith and a place of outreach for those in need in the surrounding neighborhoods. Or, as is said so well in the Mission Statement of St. Ambrose Parish, [it is] "...an anchor in the Park Heights Community...a beacon of hope, through the Spirit of Christ and the Sacraments." So,

I came this morning, to celebrate with you, not only a building but its mission, to give thanks with you both for the spiritual home that is ours and its outreach, and to thank you for fulfilling the mission of St. Ambrose under the loving guidance of Fr. Paul, his fellow Capuchins, Deacon Rubio, together with the religious sisters who both lead and serve us, Sister Anne Marie, and Sister Stephen. We take this moment to thank the Oblates of Providence and the School Sisters of Notre Dame for their continual service to this parish through the years. I also want to thank the lay leadership of your parish - and, in that connection, let me not fail to mention the families in the parish who are its heart and soul, and, most especially our mothers, both living and deceased, mothers, grandmothers, godmothers, who love and nurture their children and families. They are heroic in their love and heroic in handing on the faith. Let us thank them on this Mothers' Day!

The Home of the Good Shepherd

As I just mentioned, St. Ambrose has been blessed by the pastoral guidance of Fr. Paul who has served as your pastor, if I'm not mistaken, since the year 2004. Let us express our deepest gratitude to Father Paul for being such a good shepherd! On a day when we recall parish history, we remember the founding pastor, Fr. Walsh, and Msgr. Monahan, already mentioned, who oversaw the building of this church. But let us also remember with love Fr. Henry Zerhusen, the 8th pastor of St. Ambrose, who, in the late 60's, led the way in desegregating St. Ambrose Church and School as he welcomed Park Heights' newest residents - may he rest in peace! I think of Sr. Charmaine Krohe who directed the St. Ambrose Outreach Center, providing services and hope to the Park Heights neighborhood and beyond. It was also Sr. Charmaine and Deacon Watson Fulton who kept St. Ambrose afloat during those difficult years when there was no resident pastor here at St. Ambrose. Not all of us were around in those days but we recall our history with love even as we ask for the grace to write new chapters in this history in the years ahead.

Yet, as we survey the history written by those who went before us and think about the challenges we face in writing new chapters, especially in these difficult times for our beloved City of Baltimore - we realize our need to turn to the One who is the Source of all that is good, viz., Jesus! St. Ambrose Church, it is true, is our spiritual home but it would not be the uniquely important home that it is were it not first and

foremost an earthly “home” of the Good Shepherd, a dwelling place of the Risen Lord Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit, always under the loving gaze of God, the Father of Mercies. Ultimately, isn’t this is what attracts us to this place and enables us to be the community of faith we are striving to become?

For this reason, we listened with love and attentiveness as the Good Shepherd himself spoke to us in the words of Sacred Scripture. Jesus, who is both our Good Shepherd and the Lamb who was slain for us, says to us: “My sheep hear my voice; I know them and they follow me; and they shall never perish.” Let us stop and think about what the Lord is saying to us this morning. Jesus is claiming us as his own people, as a people whom loves. In laying down his life, Jesus didn’t merely redeem humanity in general. He redeemed all of us and each of us – for he knows us, each by name. And not superficially! Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves and he loves us more than we could ever imagine. He loves us for who we are and as we are, so in his Presence, we don’t have to pretend! Jesus also knows what is in our hearts; what worries us; what causes us anxiety, fear, and anger. When life is difficult, as it often is, Jesus walks with us, protects us, and cares for us. He wipes the tears from our eyes and whispers to our hearts words of encouragement. And he will provide for our needs, even when prospects seem dim.

When we stray, as often we do, Jesus doesn’t write us off; no one is a ‘lost cause’. No, Jesus came into the world – God’s own Son became as one of us – to search for us, to search for us when we wander away from God’s friendship, to seek us out when we are lost in the dark valley of sin. How often the Good Shepherd rescues us from our sins and brought us back – lovingly, gently, but firmly – to flock of God, to the community of friends and disciples which his Father in heaven had given him, especially in the beautiful and life-giving Sacrament of Reconciliation. How we should rejoice when the Holy Spirit urges us to repent of our sins for it is voice of the Good Shepherd calling us home, calling us back to his love.

And like a Good Shepherd, Jesus makes sure that you and I are nourished, that we graze not in places where will spiritually starve or be poisoned – not in places that will destroy us not only in body but also in soul – places that lead to addiction and violence and to isolation and sadness. No, Jesus wants us to graze where the food is good, and by this I mean the nourishment of his Word that reaches us through the

words of Scripture, words of spirit and life, words that strengthen us and give us hope, words that inspire us and fill us with the love of God. So too Jesus nourishes in another way, a most beautiful and mysterious way – This Shepherd feeds us with his own flesh and blood for in the Eucharist we receive Christ’s Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity – and so we sing in grateful praise – “We are his people, the flock he tends!”

The Mission of St. Ambrose Parish

All of which leads us back full circle back to the mission of St. Ambrose Parish. We are a people whom the Good Shepherd loves with an infinite love and we find in our parish, the home of the Good Shepherd, protection and care. But as we absorb something of the Lord’s love for us, we also realize that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, wants our help, our assistance in reaching out to those in our neighborhoods and families who need his love. In our first reading we saw how Paul and Barnabas reached out in the Lord’s name both to Jews and to Gentiles – and their mission was not easy. There was persecution, misunderstanding, rivalry, and jealousy! Yet Paul and Barnabas persevered because they knew that, in the Holy Spirit, Jesus was always at their side, always leading them, always guiding them.

So too, the mission entrusted to this and every parish is not easy. But let us not ever forget: The Lord, the Good Shepherd, is at our side, just as he was for Paul and Barnabas. And so this morning, I join you not only in giving thanks for the blessing of years but also in praying that St. Ambrose will remain a beacon of hope in Park Heights for many, many more years to come – ad multos annos! May God bless you and keep you always in his love!