

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time; St. Katharine Drexel/Christ the King Parish

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November 5, 2017

Katharine Drexel:

It is a joy to return to St. Katharine Drexel Parish this morning to bless the beautiful new Marian Shrine, even as I see with my own eyes this beautiful new church with all its stained glass windows installed. Fr. Keith, together with your parish family, we express our warmest thanks! And my warmest thanks to you, the parish family of St. Katharine Drexel! May your beautiful new spiritual home become ever more beautiful by your witness to the Gospel and by your missionary outreach to the whole parish family, including those who, for whatever reason, no longer practice the faith.

Christ the King:

After years of consultation and planning, the parishes of Glen Burnie have once again come together as one parish while maintaining, at least for the present, four different worship sites. I come today to thank all of you for participating so generously in this process and to thank Fr. Lou Martin and the parish lay leadership for guiding it. In the grace of the Holy Spirit poured into loving hearts, may we find in our unity new strength to bear witness to Christ and new vigor in bringing the joy of the Gospel to those who no longer practice the faith.

In fact, we could say that today's Scripture readings speak about the Church's mission, both what that mission is and even more so, how we are to engage in it. The setting for this discussion is Jesus' warning to his disciples not to imitate the arrogance of the religious leaders of his day. Here, Jesus is not taking issue with

their authority or competence but rather with their hypocrisy, harshness, and pride.

The Pharisees were *hypocritical* to the extent that they taught the law of Moses authoritatively in all its rigor but did not practice what they preached ... they said one thing and did another. Jesus' advice to his followers was to follow their teaching but not their bad example. How different the Pharisees were from Jesus whose humanity perfectly reflected God's goodness and love. And how important that all of us in ministry of any form examine our consciences lest we follow the bad example of the Pharisees. Thus, when a priest is ordained, for example, the Church instructs him: "... believe what you teach and to practice what you teach."

The Pharisees were *harsh* to the extent that they laid heavy burdens on people. They loaded them down with obligations and requirements of the law but did nothing to help them discover God's love for them. How different from Jesus whose 'yoke is easy and whose burden is light.' In our second reading, St. Paul described how gentle he was with the Thessalonians, "like a nursing mother who cares for her children," full of affection, pouring out his very life, working tirelessly on their behalf. Here I also think of how Pope Francis insists that those in ministry of any form accompany God's people on their journey of life and faith, listening to them, helping bear their burdens, and discover God's love for them.

And finally, the Pharisees were *prideful* to the extent that they laid claim to exalted titles, places of honor, and distinctive dress, all of which seem to be on display today as I stand before you! To tell the truth, titles, honors, and distinctive dress are real pitfalls in ministry, especially if they become the center of one's of life and the source of one's dignity. Again, today's readings call for an examination of conscience on the part of those who serve you in ministry, especially ordained ministry. Jesus, of course, was called Rabbi, St. Paul claimed the title of "father" and the Lord himself wore tassels on his garments in accord with the law of Moses. Yet, how different Jesus was from the Pharisees who sought to exalt themselves instead of giving praise to God the Father and instead of making the living God the very center of their lives. Jesus was the beloved Son so he loves God the Father like no other. Jesus was the Messiah, the Anointed, and thus the King of the Universe - yet he was "poor in spirit" and "meek and humble of heart." This is how he wants his disciples also to be.

So, as we reflect on today's Scripture readings, or so it seems to me, three qualities of mind and heart proper to missionary disciples stand out, three qualities so necessary for any and all of us to engage in the Church's mission of bringing the light and love of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others, but especially those who feel separated, even alienated, from the Church. These qualities are integrity, humility, and compassion. Please permit me a word about each.

For us, *integrity* means that we have opened our hearts to Christ in the Holy Spirit and we have allowed the Lord's love to transform us inwardly such that our daily lives, with all their busyness, confusion, and mischance, more and more come to reflect the goodness and beauty of Jesus. Far from being smug and convinced of our own perfection, we are rather fellow disciples who are on the way, aware of our need for mercy, yet confident that God does not spurn a humble, contrite heart. When people see in us authenticity and hope, they are attracted not to us but to Jesus and our fervent hope and prayer is that they become members of his Body, the Church.

For us, *humility* is more than being self-effacing or reticent to talk about ourselves, though in our noisy culture, that's probably a good place to start. Yet, Christian humility is something more profound and more beautiful. Isn't it the recognition that everything we are and have comes from God? Isn't it a life of gratitude to God for the blessings he has poured out upon us and a recognition that we depend on him for everything? Humility is that virtue which makes us aware of our faults and failings, of our need for God's mercy and forgiveness, and veers us away from making harsh judgments about others. And when we hear Jesus' words about avoiding honors and titles with humble hearts, we recognize that it is Christ who must be at the center of our lives, not ourselves.

And for us, *compassion* means a readiness not to focus on our own problems but rather to focus on the sufferings and needs of those around us as well as people around the world who are suffering more than we can imagine - people who, in this global village, have become our "neighbors". And as we strive to live the Gospel and recognize our own need for mercy, we should ask for the grace of a newfound readiness to walk with others in their problems, sufferings, and moral struggles - But let us also walk with purpose for when we walk with others in compassion the

Risen Lord also walks with us, opening our minds and hearts to his Word and leading us to the Eucharist and to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the fonts of his mercy and compassion so readily available to us all.

As we look toward the future, let us take heart. Let us be grateful that we are brothers and sisters in Christ living and working together in the Church under the provident eye of our loving Father, and daily enlivened in our faith by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit whose grace we receive in the Sacraments. Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, may the Spirit of God continually form us into those credible witnesses to Jesus, people of integrity, humility, and compassion, for the glory of his Name and for the salvation of souls.

May God bless us and keep us in his love.