

Archbishop Lori's Homily - 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Installation of Fr. Ernest Cibelli

St. Mary Parish

Jan. 21, 2018

I'm delighted to return to St. Mary's to install Father Ernest Cibelli as your pastor. It could hardly be said, however, that we rushed into this! Father Cibelli has been "on the job" for quite some time now and you have come to know him as the good priest and pastor that he is, as he goes about serving your pastoral needs with dedication and love.

With Father Cibelli, I thank you, the parishioners of St. Mary Parish, for striving to grow in holiness, for seeking to live as the Lord's disciples, and for all you do to advance the Church's mission in Hagerstown and beyond. Part of that mission is St. Mary's School - and so I take this occasion to congratulate your principal, Patricia McDermott, as well as your teachers, staff, parents - and, of course, our great students - on being named a blue ribbon school by the U.S. Department of Education! Let me also thank all those involved in the evangelization and formation of the young as well as those who carry forward the mission and many ministries of this parish.

Father Cibelli's installation reminds us that the Pastor's mission and that of his parish is in fact nothing other than an extension of the Lord's own mission. To that point, today's Scripture readings help us understand more fully how the Lord's mission continues in the daily life of the Church ...

Beginning with the first reading from the Book of Jonah. As we heard, Jonah's mission was to call the people of Nineveh to repentance, just as Jesus began his ministry with the words, "repent and believe!" Jonah was given no easy task, for Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, was indeed a large and prominent city. But because Jonah spoke for God, his words had an immediate effect on the whole city. After only three days, a fast was proclaimed and the people repented. I'll bet Father Cibelli wishes things moved so quickly! Yet, the Pastor has an ongoing responsibility to proclaim our need for conversion, repentance, and reform in our lives; and then to lead his people to find forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Doing so is indeed an act of love, an act of authentic pastoral charity. For in calling us to repentance, the pastor is making us aware of the ways, big and small, that we exclude God from our daily lives. The Pastor is helping us to forsake whatever it is in our lives that keeps us from opening our hearts to the Lord's love. Think of it this way: as parents you love your children. Part of loving your children is keeping them from danger and helping them to grow. Sometimes you have to be a Jonah to your family even as the pastor has to be a Jonah to his parish family.

And just as Jesus taught the people, mostly in parables, so too the pastor must be a wise and love teacher of his people in the ways of faith. And so today's response to the reading from Jonah was: "Teach me your ways!" A primary duty of every pastor is to teach the faith in a joyful, faithful, life-giving way. Of course, he recruits others to help him in the task of teaching but it remains his first responsibility to be a teacher of the faith himself, both by word and also by example. He is to proclaim the faith, instruct others in truth and goodness, but also to live the truth in love, to model a life of virtue and discipleship, to show us what a life formed according to the mind of Christ is like. In teaching the faith, the Pastor seeks, above all, to open our hearts to the Lord who is good and compassionate, the God "who shows sinners the way." This the Pastor does as one who personally depends upon the Lord's mercy both in his own personal life and in his ministry.

But where does repentance and the teaching of the faith lead? As we see in the Gospel, Jesus calls us not only to repent and believe but also to follow him as his disciples, to be his followers and to engage in his mission, in a phrase, to be “fishers of men”. That is why the Lord called Simon, Andrew, James, and John to follow him just as he called Father Cibelli to become a priest - (and indeed the Lord is calling many young people in this very parish to serve the Church as priests and religious). By preaching effectively, by celebrating reverently the Mass and the Sacraments, by serving your pastoral needs with wisdom and compassion - in so many ways - Father Cibelli seeks to help you in God’s grace to encounter Christ and to hear him calling you to be a faithful Catholic - but a faithful Catholic is always first and foremost a follower of Jesus. And to be a follower of Jesus means we’ve opened our minds and hearts to his love; it means we seek to live in the Lord’s presence, under his loving gaze, and allow him to redeem and transform our lives completely and to fill us with a grace, a peace, and joy the world cannot give, so much so that we want to share our faith and our joy with others. And so Father Cibelli works with you, with his staff and lay leadership, to create, in God’s grace, a parish that is mission-oriented, made up of missionary disciples dedicated to the work of spreading the Gospel, winning over those who no longer practice the faith and those seeking the Lord.

The principal way most of us engage in the work of evangelization is by living “a transfigured way of life capable of amazing the world” (cf. St. John Paul II), a way of life that reflects the primacy & power of Christ’s grace and love in our lives. In the same vein, Pope Benedict XVI said that ‘people who have hope live differently.’ If we truly stake our lives on the Lord and his love, there will be something distinctive about the way we live - how we speak, how we make use of this world’s goods, how we make decisions, how we treat others, how we bear suffering, insults, and failure... Even without words our lives will say to the others that the Gospel we follow is true, the hope we’ve embraced is real, and the love we share is authentically God’s love. This is the way of life St. Paul is speaking of in today’s

readings from 1 Corinthians, where he speaks about living in this passing world with our hearts set on the world that is to come. Thus, no matter how long we may live or how long the world may endure, St. Paul tells us that the time is short because history itself is framed by the Death and Resurrection of Christ on the one hand and by the Lord's Second Coming on the other. And so we use the good things of the world but are not enslaved by them, we go about our daily work but in a spirit of loving service to others, especially the poor, the sick, and the vulnerable... because our eyes are fixed on Jesus and on his love for us. In this way, our lives embody the Gospel and make it believable to others.

Clearly, the core mission of the Pastor - to extend the mission of Jesus - is challenging, impossible really, if one tries to accomplish this mission on one's own. But let us take heart for the Lord is with us in the power of the Holy Spirit - with us through Father Cibelli and his priestly ministry, with us in Word and Sacrament, with us in the poor and needy, with us in this worshipping community, with us and within us for the Lord dwells in our hearts through faith. Truly we are together in mission. May the Lord bless Father Cibelli and the mission and ministry of this parish family - and, in his goodness, keep us always in his love!

Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for us!