

Archbishop Lori's Homily - 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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St. John the Evangelist, Severna Park

St. Edward, Baltimore

Jan. 27-28, 2018

Introduction at St. John the Evangelist, Severna Park:

It is a delight to return to St. John the Evangelist Parish to offer Holy Mass with you and for you and to bless the beautiful new Parish Activity Center. Congratulations on the completion of this impressive facility which will greatly benefit both parish and school for many years to come. It is the result of wonderful leadership on the part of your pastor, Fr. Proffitt, as also the leadership of your pastoral council, finance council & building committee. It is directly the result of the generosity of this parish family - expressing your love for your parish as well as your dedication to its mission of spreading the Gospel and helping to form us all in the truth and love of Jesus.

This project is also part of a larger effort to renovate the parish as such, including the worship space where we've gathered for Mass: perhaps to brighten the church that it will speak to us of the light of Christ and to help us raise our minds and hearts more easily to the Lord in worship. More important than all else is your response to Pope Francis' call that all parishes undergo what he calls a "missionary conversion". This is a clear recognition of what the Lord is asking us in these times when so many of our fellow Catholics no longer practice the faith and when so many people are living lives adrift from the Lord's truth and love. Transforming a parish into a vital center of missionary activity is not easy; it can be a cause for misunderstanding and discomfort. But your parish is taking the call to missionary discipleship seriously and for that I thank you and offer you my wholehearted support. For we desire nothing more than to know and love the Lord and to share the Gospel with others in a manner that is convincing, in a manner that transforms their way of life and ours as well.

And, as it happens, today's Scripture readings offer us insight into how to share the

Word of God lovingly, truthfully, and convincingly. Beginning with today's reading from the Book of Deuteronomy...

Introduction at St. Edward's, Baltimore:

I am delighted to return to St. Edward's to offer Holy Mass and to have the opportunity to visit with your parish family. This is a moment for us to join together in thanking Father Honest Munishi for his dedicated priestly leadership: his love of the St. Edward's community and his service to the wider community. For all this and more, Father Honest, we express our heartfelt thanks! I also want to thank the Spiritans, Father Honest's religious community, for making available to us all such a wonderful priest.

And it is also a moment for me to thank you, the parish community of St. Edward's, for being "a light brightly visible" here in the Mosher neighborhood of Baltimore. You are no stranger to what makes headlines in the media: high crime, homelessness, drugs, and a host of other social problems. In the midst of so many heart-rending social problems, St. Edward's stands out as a beautiful community of faith, worship, and service. I think of how you extend yourselves in love to your neighbors; how you participate in prayer walks, offer a food pantry, and host a job training site for Catholic Charities and so much, much more.

Above all, St. Edwards shines bright with the Word of God and the Sacraments and seeks to share the Word of God effectively and convincingly in this part of our beloved City of Baltimore. And, as a matter of fact, today's Scripture readings have to do with sharing God's Word in a manner that is loving, truthful, and convincing... beginning with our first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy...

Homily:

In that reading, Moses petitioned God to send the people of Israel a prophet. After all, the people found direct communication with God overwhelming and so they asked for a go-between, a spokesperson, if you will. In biblical terms, that person is called a prophet, someone who speaks for God. God answers Moses' petition in the affirmative. He says to Moses: "I will put my words in his mouth." The prophet will have authority as long as he speaks for God but if he falsifies or dilutes God's Word, the prophet loses his authority. God promises to send a prophet in whom the people

could put their trust. His word would be truthful, compassionate, and reliable. Aren't we longing, pining, and aching for people in our culture to tell us the truth? We've become a society that no longer trusts its leaders, no longer trusts the media, no longer trusts that much of anyone is looking out for us. Too many denials of wrong doing that later on turned out not to be true; too many half-hearted apologies; too much so-called "fake news"; too many people try to bully us and try to force their opinion on us. All this and more has built a culture of division and distrust. And this culture of distrust is not limited to politics, business, or the media. I think we all feel it - anyone who is in any position of authority feels it. It's certainly something I have to contend with as a religious leader and it's something we all have to contend with in our relationships at home, at work, at school, and even among our friends and neighbors. We long for someone to say to us, as Walter Cronkite used to do on the Evening News: "And that's the way it is!" . . . someone whom we can rely on to tell us the truth, but no one seems to have that authority in our culture anymore.

This brings us to the Gospel where we hear the people saying the very thing we like to say but find ourselves unable to say. Hearing Jesus teach and seeing Jesus heal, they rejoiced and said of him: "What's this? A completely new teaching presented with authority!" Or as St. Matthew's Gospel tells us, "...the crowds were astonished at [Jesus'] teaching, for he taught them as one have authority, and not as their scribes" (7:29).

What could this mean except that Moses request for a prophet, Moses' request for someone to speak for God honestly and lovingly found its definitive answer in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh? It's not merely that Jesus was more competent than the Scribes and Pharisees when it came to interpreting the intricacies of Law. No, Jesus came was one who not only spoke for God but was God, the only Son of God sent into the world to bring Good News to the poor, the only Son of God sent into the world to save us from our sins. And so when Jesus spoke in the synagogue, he didn't say things that were complicated and hard to understand. Jesus didn't dazzle the people with learning or with his oratory. He spoke humbly, lovingly, in a way that touched people's hearts helped them see themselves as God sees them, opening them up to God's love, and helped to chase away the demons of hatred, lust, and dishonesty. When Jesus healed the man with the unclean spirit, everyone in that synagogue knew that Jesus had the power to heal them as well! This is what they

meant when they said Jesus taught with the authority! This is the prophet, the authoritative teaching for which they were waiting. And Jesus is the prophet, the authoritative teacher for which we too are waiting. For we can put our absolute trust in Jesus!

As we put our trust in Jesus, as we trust in his teaching and open our hearts to him in love, something wonderful happens. Our hearts, our minds, our lives are transformed by the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit. No longer are our lives driven by fear, anxiety, or self-centeredness. Instead, as St. Paul teaches us in today's second reading, even if we are trying to make a go of it in this very complicated world of ours, we are free of distraction and anxiety such that God's Word finds a home in us.

When that happens, then we too begin to speak "with authority" - Instead of being clever or opinionated, we will speak with hearts that are filled with the light, the love, and the goodness of God himself. Our words will have the ring of truth, the truth that comes from God; and our deeds will be authentic, an authenticity that comes from God. We will be people who engender trust in others - a trust that heals wounds of sin and division; a trust that helps to make the Gospel and the Church credible; a trust that helps to repair our badly fragmented society.

So let us allow Jesus to speak to us with authority today - the authority of a goodness that is stronger than evil; the authority of truth that exposes all lies; the authority of a love that conquers sin and death. Then we too will speak with the authority of love and thus engage well and wisely in the work of spreading the Gospel. May God bless us and keep us always in his love!