

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Archdiocesan Staff Retreat Day

Tuesday 33rd Week II

Retreat Day: Archdiocesan Staff

Franciscan Monastery, Ellicott City

Nov. 20, 2018

To quote the Apostle Peter, "It is good for us to be here!" Granted, we do not have before us the astonishing vision of the Transfigured Lord but we have indeed gathered in his Name and he is with us as we set aside time for reflection, prayer, and refreshment. And nothing refreshes and restores us like the living Word of God, leading us into the heart of Christ's Eucharistic Sacrifice, indeed, the Banquet of his Sacrifice.

We gather like this every year and it is good to do so, but this, my friends, is no ordinary time. The abuse crisis is a pervasive and unhappy fact in the life of the Church, a calamity that affects your outlook and attitudes, no matter what division you work in, no matter what ministry you engage in. I'm going to guess that this crisis crosses your mind every day as you come into work and that it confronts you in one way or another during your workday. And in case it doesn't, there are some who will remind you of it: "Oh, you work for the Archdiocese, don't you?" Yes, you do, and I'm most, most grateful. All the more reason why it is good that we are here, for a day of refreshment. Sometimes those who run a "field hospital" need a "field hospital".

Living as we do in a time that is anything but ordinary, we also find that Sacred Scripture speaks to us even more powerfully than usual. Today's readings are case in point - in the Book of Revelation, the prophetic message to the Church at Sardis and the Church at Laodicea and in the Gospel of Luke, the story of Zacchaeus' conversion. Taken together those readings speak to us powerfully of the communal conversion and the personal conversion we must undergo in order to address the abuse crisis at its roots and to engage in the work of evangelization with integrity and love.

Communal Conversion

In today's reading from the Book of Revelation, the Spirit addresses prophetic messages from Christ Himself to the local churches of Sardis and Laodicea. Both churches appeared to be prospering, both appeared to be at peace, just as we might have imagined ourselves to be, prior to August of this year, when the revelation of Archbishop McCarrick's misdeeds hit us like an asteroid. Indeed, the angelic message that upbraided Sardis and Laodicea for becoming complacent and lukewarm ... now upbraids us, shaking us from that complacency and tepidity that so easily creep into our churches and our hearts.

To the Church at Sardis, a well-to-do city located in modern-day Turkey (a church soon to be led by a brilliant preacher of the Paschal Mystery, Melito of Sardis), the Spirit of the Lord has this to say: "You have a reputation for being alive but you are dead. Be watchful and strengthen what is left..." - oh, how those words should resonate. Many parishes, institutions, and ministries rumble along day after day. They appear to function reasonably well but are living, as it were, without a heart, without a heart aflame, alive, invigorated for the mission of evangelization. We need to gather up 'what is left' and ask the Lord to fill it with his Spirit! The Spirit goes on to say to the Church at Sardis that only "...a few people in Sardis have not soiled their garments..." that is to say, only a few have attained the purity of heart and victory over sin that should be the hallmarks of the missionary disciple Evangelization does not fare well in an atmosphere of presumption, and presumption remains the "sin-du-jour", and a root cause for the crisis we are in.

The Church at Laodicea, not far from the better known city of Colossae, is upbraided for being lukewarm, for being neither hot nor cold, for being self-satisfied, and for a kind of cluelessness as to how it appeared in the eyes of God - badly needing to be healed and clothed with virtue. "You do not realize," the angel says to that local church,

"that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked." Words that should again resonate as we struggle with communities in our midst and indeed as sometimes we struggle with our very selves. How easy it is to imagine that, while there is decline here and there, we are really doing alright and that nothing much needs to change.

Six mission priorities? Who needs them? Missionary discipleship. A nice phrase. Just let us alone, and we'll be just fine. A lukewarm, self-satisfied church is a petri dish for the devil's mischief.

Let take heart in this moment of crisis as the Spirit of God addresses us. Yesterday, speaking to the Presbyteral Council, John Romanowsky and many of the priests who were gathered there spoke about a new-found intentionality among many Catholics who have taken it upon themselves to fast, to pray, to engage in ministry. Without ideological agendas in hand, they seek to heal the church. "Behold," the Lord says to us, "I stand at the door and knock." Let us hear the Lord knocking on the door of our churches and our hearts. Let us take from this day a renewed and grace-filled determination to do work of an evangelist, to do the work of ministry, whether it is welcome or unwelcome, convenient or inconvenient.

Personal Conversion

Indeed, this renewed determination will not take root in us without an ongoing and deep personal conversion in our hearts, an ongoing conversion of mind and heart modeled for us by Zacchaeus. In his enthusiasm to encounter Jesus, Zacchaeus climbed a tree - a tree which St. Augustine compares to the tree of the Cross. And in that moment Jesus called Zacchaeus by name, called him down, and visited both his heart and his home. True to form the Pharisees criticized both the host and his guest, but in the face of such criticism, Zacchaeus bore witness to what the Lord was already doing in his life: he vowed to give half his possessions to the poor and to make abundant restitution to anyone from whom he had extorted money. Later, Christ himself would mount a tree, the tree of the Cross, to give his life in love, so that Zacchaeus and all of us might be forgiven and live.

Communal and personal conversion. May it be said of us that salvation has come to our house - to the household of the Church and to the household of our hearts! Then will be equipped, truly equipped, for the ministry of evangelization even in 'stormy weather', even 'when it's raining all the time!' May God bless us and keep us always in his love.