

Archbishop Lori's Homily - Bon Secours 50th Anniversary Mass of Thanksgiving

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Bon Secours Retreat and Conference Center

Marriottsville, Maryland

Jan. 29, 2018

I am delighted to join with all of you in celebrating the 50th Anniversary of this beautiful place, the Bons Secours Retreat and Conference Center.

In welcoming all of us so warmly, Sister Rose Marie, Leader of the Bon Secours Sisters in the United States, and Kevin Cassidy, Director of Operations, alluded to the very interesting history of this building and these grounds. Let me also allude to that history in the hope of shedding light on the mission of this Center to help us all discern the Lord's will and the right path in these times which Pope Francis describes not as "an era of change but rather as the change of an era."

I could not begin these reflections without expressing my gratitude to you, the Bons Secours Sisters, for your presence and ministry here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, beginning in the year 1881 at the invitation of James Cardinal Gibbons. From 1883 until 1959, your motherhouse and novitiate was in West Baltimore but as your numbers grew the need was felt for a larger facility to house not only your provincial headquarters and novitiate but also an infirmary. And with a providential eye for real estate, you acquired this beautiful site and constructed this handsome multi-purpose building.

Not long after it was completed, however, it became clear that the functions originally envisioned for this building would need to give way other purposes, other uses, other ministries. And thus, in 1968, under the direction of Sister Mary Margaret Burger, a ministry of directing and providing for retreats began. As Sister Mary Margaret put it, "We planned for one purpose. God had another purpose in

mind.”

Over these past five decades, the ministry she pioneered has grown and developed. This house, surrounded by an abundance of natural beauty, became a spiritual environment, a place of prayer and discernment, for individuals of varying faiths, for parishes, diverse ministries and institutions, and for people seeking to find the right path for their enterprises. It is a place centered on Christ and animated by the Bons Secours charism, a spirituality expressed in giving “good help to those in need” – compassionate help – a spirituality often expressed in the ministry of healthcare but also expressed here, in this house, where you share with all of us your beautiful spirit of prayer, hospitality, peacefulness, and love. Thank you, Sisters, and thanks to your many lay co-workers and colleagues who provided this ministry last year to over 350 groups!

The history of this center’s changing purposes and developing ministry might be seen as a metaphor for its very mission to the many people and groups it welcomes. For indeed, as an old and often quoted Yiddish proverb would have it, “We make our plans and God laughs.” Perhaps we could adjust this proverb a bit to say that as we seek to make our plans prayerfully and discerningly – God gradually reveals to us the designs of his heart.

How true this is of individuals who find their lives interrupted, sometimes by opportunity, sometimes by failure, tragedy, or conflict; and sometimes by a persistent restlessness due to the fact that God has something else in mind for them. How true this is of ministries – parishes, schools, healthcare, & social services – that seek to serve the needs of church and society in a rapidly changing landscape. In the rough and tumble of daily life, it may be hard to discern not only the right path but the wise and loving path for an organization to take. There is need, therefore, for individuals and groups of all kinds – and to discern how to respond to change – not merely to survive but to find God’s purposes in the challenges we face individually and corporately. So, to repeat, the response of this center to change and challenge serves as a metaphor for its mission to help us all find paths of truth, goodness, and service amid the changes and challenges of our lives.

God’s purposes, of course, cannot be discerned merely as a matter of expediency.

Rather, God's purposes are discerned only in a spirit of prayer, reflection, and patience and love. Thus, in the reading from Sirach, we are taught to ask not merely for worldly success and prosperity but rather for a wise heart and for the presence of the Lord in our lives.

Paul, writing to the Church at Colossae, a church that was undergoing its own pastoral challenges, urges its members to embrace, as God's chosen ones, "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience" - and to bring to the table a spirit of reconciliation - such that we can hear one another and thus hear the voice of God.

And it is Jesus who raises the bar as he challenges us to love others not merely as ourselves but to love others as he has first loved us. This cries out for the need we have to place ourselves under God's gaze, to absorb in our lives the love which God has for us, to allow that love to transform our attitudes and our choices, to allow that love to transform our interactions with others and with the larger society. Bons Secours Retreat and Conference Center is the perfect setting to do just that! Thus we build bridges of understanding and action; thus we follow the path leading to a peace the world cannot give.

In the rough and tumble of daily life, it can be difficult to pray and discern deeply, to see the larger picture, to sort out priorities, to discern the path ahead. Thank you for providing a place of peace, serenity, and love where so many can come away from their daily surroundings so as to be surrounded by your prayerfulness and hospitality.

May this beautiful and life-giving ministry continue for years to come! Ad multos annos!