

Archbishop Lori's Homily: St. James 150th Anniversary, Boonsboro, MD

24th Sunday Ordinary Time

St. James 150th Anniversary

Boonsboro, Maryland

Sept. 15, 2018

I am grateful for the opportunity to join with you on this festive occasion, the 150th anniversary of St. James Parish here in Boonsboro. I am told you have planned various events to commemorate the founding of your parish and its long history, to remember and give thanks for those who, over time, built up your parish thanks to their faith, goodness, and generosity. As you know, for much of your history, St. James was a mission Church served for many years by priests of St. Mary's in Hagerstown and more recently by St. Augustine in Williamsport. And today you are part of the South Washington County Pastorates, in league with St. Augustine and St. Joseph Parish, all of which are served effectively and generously by Father John Jicha.

We cannot let a day such as this pass without mentioning the names of Dr. Otho Smith and his son Dr. Josiah Smith, who were instrumental in building the first brick chapel here on the western side of South Mountain. Nor can we omit the name of Fr. John Jones who served as the first spiritual leader of this community of faith. We remember them with gratitude, even as we build upon what they established. Fr. Jicha has shared with me plans to make needed improvements to your church, including a new air conditioning system and the replacement of the moveable wall that separates the church from the parish hall as well as other changes that would make your church more functional and more beautiful. Congratulations on these plans and I hope to come back sometime soon to celebrate with you their completion and to bless them!

Since this is a festive occasion, however, I wondered if it would mar your joy were I to address the present crisis which continues to grip our Church. Seeking pastoral

wisdom, I consulted Father Jicha who said that, by all means, I should address this matter with you as best as I am able. After all, the contemplated renovations of your church, properly understood, signal something more profound, namely, the renovation of our hearts and the ongoing renovation of the Church itself.

A Time of Upheaval

So let me state the obvious: as Catholics we find ourselves in a time of upheaval. In the wake of the the Archbishop McCarrick scandal, the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report, many people, including yourselves, are angry and bewildered. The unspeakable crimes against the innocent perpetrated by many clerics – including those who have risen to the Church’s highest ranks – coupled with the failure of some bishops to respond to allegations of abuse with thoroughness and candor – all this has created a crisis of trust. Many no longer trust the Church and its leaders. Today I stand before you as one of the Church’s very imperfect leaders.

As this crisis has deepened, people are demanding action, and action now. You rightly ask what will be done, what will be different, and what is in place to prevent such terrible things from happening again. And there is frustration that an across-the-board plan of action has yet to be devised and that some bishops who have broken trust remain in ministry. One disappointed parishioner put it this way: “Archbishop, we are moving at the speed of church!” Even though it will take time for the Bishops of the United States and the Vatican to get to the bottom of troubling questions and to agree on a plan of action, just like you, I want to get this done and done quickly. This week’s meeting between the Pope and the leadership of the U.S. Bishops is a very good sign that the work has begun to put in place ways to hold bishops accountable for misconduct and for failing to deal appropriately with allegations of abuse. As proposed, these initiatives would call upon the leadership and expertise of the laity and would be widely and easily accessible to those whose voices should be heard. In the coming weeks, I shall be engaged with my fellow bishops in further developing and refining these proposals in the hope of implementing them as quickly as possible.

Efforts at the Local Level

In meantime, I pledge to continue working closely with both major seminaries in the

Archdiocese of Baltimore, St. Mary's in Baltimore and Mt. St. Mary's in Emmitsburg, to ensure that our seminarians are formed to be good, faithful, well-integrated, and generous priests. I vow to continue cooperating with all levels of law enforcement in Maryland and to continue reaching out to victims of abuse, offering assistance whether or not it is mandated by law. I pledge to continue continually update the list of offending priests first posted on our website in 2002, and to continue taking direction from our Independent Lay Review Board. Under its guidance, our policies to protect the young are continually strengthened and our response to every allegation, whether new or old, is carefully reviewed. The goal is to root out anyone who would pose a threat to young people.

In this connection, I want to thank Fr. Jicha and yourselves for your leadership in ensuring that mandated policies to protect the young are vigorously implemented. These include criminal background checks, fingerprinting, and training for clergy, staff, and volunteers who work with young people. You adhere faithfully to the policy of immediately reporting not only any overt behavior that endangers the innocent and the vulnerable, but also the telltale warning signs that current training enables us to recognize. Thanks to your help, any and all criminal behavior is reported to law enforcement and every allegation is carefully reviewed not only by the Archdiocese but also by the Independent Lay Review Board which, in my service to you, has the last word on all these matters. It is your leadership and cooperation that enable such efforts to succeed in dramatically reducing the incidents of abuse, beginning in the mid-1980's and continuing to the present moment. Please accept my heartfelt thanks!

That said, we have a long, long way to go. I've dealt with the painful and ugly specter of abuse for a quarter-century. I've learned that no policy, procedure, or outreach undoes the pain of those who have fallen victim to those who should have given them a shepherd's care. Going forward it is not only a matter of adopting best practices or working harder. What is most needed is deep repentance, beginning with me, your bishop. What is most needed is that we would unite in following Jesus, our Messiah and Lord.

The Call to Discipleship

How we might do this is well-described for us in today's Gospel where Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declares that Jesus is Messiah and Lord. Whether times are good or bad, peaceful or filled with controversy and scandal, we must unite, my friends, in proclaiming Jesus Christ to be our Savior, Jesus Christ who is "the same yesterday, today, and forever." Our Savior still loves his Church with an immeasurable love, even when we sin! And having confessed the Name of Jesus as the foundation of our Church and of our lives as members of the Church, we must not make Peter's mistake of trying to make Jesus into a Messiah who conforms to our thoughts, opinions, or ways of thinking. Rather, we must get behind Jesus and follow him, knowing that when we do so, we will be asked to carry our Cross. In these difficult days, you are being asked to carry a heavy cross but if you allow me to do so, I will try to be Symon of Cyrene who will help you carry your Cross in imitation of the Savior.

And let us not forget where the Cross leads us - not to unending death but to the new life of the Resurrection. This is the mystery celebrated at each Mass here at St. James for 150 years: death to oneself and one's sins followed by a resurgence of God's grace, leading us to that day when we shall rejoice to see the Lord in all his glory - the Lord whose Name we have proclaimed "in season and out of season, when convenient and inconvenient." And may God bless you and St. James Parish now and for many, many years to come! God bless you and keep you always in his love!