

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 150th Anniversary, St. Joseph Eldersburg

3rd Sunday of Easter

150th Anniversary, St. Joseph, Eldersburg

April 15, 2018

It is a great joy to return to St. Joseph Parish, and on this occasion, to join with you in celebrating the 150th anniversary of this Catholic community. Please accept my warm congratulations and thanks as you observe this milestone in the life and history of your parish. In this anniversary year, we look to the past with gratitude; we look ahead to a future full of hope; and we embrace in faith the present moment so rich in God's grace for it is our time to evangelize, to instruct, to worship, and to serve, especially the poor and vulnerable.

How, then, does one fit 150 years of history into the short space of a homily? One way is to expand the length of the homily but I'm going to guess you don't want me to do that. Instead, I'd like to impart some sense of your heritage and hope by reflecting for a few moments on three themes: the message, the mission, and the means. Allow me to say a word about each, beginning with "the message".

The beautiful and joyous season of Easter is filled with message of salvation. Again and again the Church proclaims the good news that Christ died for our sins and rose for our salvation. We find ourselves peering into the empty tomb with the Apostles, sitting with them in the Cenacle as the Risen Lord appears, hearing, as it were, from the lips of the Risen One himself - "Why are you troubled? Look at my hands and feet and see that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have." Jesus is alive! He has conquered sin and death!

For more than 2,000 years the Church has proclaimed this life-giving message, summed up for us in today's second reading where St. John teaches us that in Jesus we have an advocate with God the Father, an advocate who loves us and pleads our cause, the cause of our salvation. This advocate, Jesus, he goes on to say, ". . . is

expiation for our sins and not for our sins only but for those of the whole world.” In season and out of season the Church proclaims that message that in Jesus our sins are forgiven and that in the Risen One we find a love stronger than sin and more powerful than death. And in the power of the Holy Spirit, this love is poured into our hearts so that we might rise above our weakness so as to reflect God’s love even in this world with the firm of hope of reflecting his love perfectly in the next. This is the message upon which the Church is founded, the message the Apostles first preached in Jerusalem, Antioch, and Rome, and thence to the whole world.

This same message was planted firmly on Maryland soil in the 17th century and by the middle of the 19th century it was long since firmly rooted in Carroll County. This message was brought by Jesuits, Sulpicians, and Redemptorists... and embraced by Catholic families in this area, especially the Owings family, in whose home Mass was celebrated before this parish was established. It was for the sake of this message that a little mission church was founded and in 1868 this parish was formally established by Archbishop Martin John Spalding. And because this message of Christ crucified and risen was faithfully preached, celebrated in the Sacraments, and lived by countless families, the parish grew and prospered into the community that it is today. So, let us ask for the grace to embrace this life-giving message as never before, allow it to penetrate our hearts, transform our lives, and give us true peace and joy.

A word, now, about mission for, by its very nature, the message of God’s love for the world and for each of us cannot be bottled up but instead must be spread far and wide. Before ascending into heaven Jesus commissioned his apostles first to go and pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit and then to go out and make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Apostles were transformed from confused and frightened men into courageous witnesses to Jesus and the Gospel.

And so throughout the season of Easter, including today, we read in the Acts of the Apostles how convincingly the Apostles spoke of Jesus crucified and risen. In today’s reading, for example, Peter is preaching in Jerusalem, in the temple area, risking his

life so as to spread the Good News of the Lord's Resurrection, telling the people that Jesus is the fulfillment of all God promised and the source of mercy, the forgiveness of our sins. In speaking this way, the Apostles experienced many hardships but they were happy, we read elsewhere, to suffer for the faith and indeed they laid down their lives out of love, just as Jesus did.

It is this same missionary spirit that caused the faith to spread throughout the world in spite of persecution and many other severe hardships. How many saintly martyrs bore witness to Christ at the price of their own lives! How many holy bishops, priests, religious, and lay women and men! Through the witness of their lives and truth of their words, message of Jesus' triumph over sin and death was brought to untold billions. And so it is that we think of those who went before us in faith in this parish; the pastors who served this parish, the religious, the catechists, and many others who transmitted the faith in their own families but also in the surrounding communities. In a special way, we give thanks for the Marianists who have served this parish since 1982 in the spirit of Blessed Chaminade and for the splendid pastoral leadership of Fr. Neville together with Fr. John and the parish deacons. You are working hard, you and your co-workers, including the staff and the lay leadership of this parish to make St. Joseph's a community of missionary disciples who are dedicated to spreading the message, and winning back those who, for whatever reason, no longer practice their faith. My prayer for this anniversary year is that your parking lot will always be crowded!

And what about the method and the means? First and foremost the message was spread and the mission was fueled, not by human energy, good will, or ingenuity but by the overflowing grace of God that accomplishes more than we ask or imagine! And so the means that God puts at our disposal for the mission are supernatural, the Word of God, the grace of the Mass and Sacraments, the power of his forgiveness, the gifts which Holy Spirit distributes as he wills to members of the congregation.

Yet these gifts operate in us in a wholly human manner. Jesus who assumed our humanity works through our humanity and through the things of this world to communicate the graces of the next world. Thus it is the Lord who grants us strength and generosity to create a spiritual home; it is he who raises up leadership and gives us the impulse to be generous not only with treasure but also with our

time and talent. Indeed it is the Lord himself who provides us with means for the mission, and looking around I would say that the Lord has blessed St. Joseph's abundantly! And for that reason we give thanks as we enter upon this anniversary and resolve in the abundance of his gifts to open our hearts to the message and embrace the mission he has entrusted to us.

In all of this you have a wonderful patron in St. Joseph who received the message in a dream and spent his life fulfilling his unique mission as Jesus' foster father with all the means that were at his disposal. May St. Joseph intercede for us in the years ahead and may God bless us and keep us always in his love!