

Installation of Fr. Dale Picarella - St. Patrick Havre d' Grace

Introduction

I am very grateful to Father Picarella who has come among you, now some time ago, to begin his service as pastor under challenging circumstances. With your new parish family, Father Dale, I want to thank you for your prayerful spirit, your readiness to listen, and for your pastoral wisdom. May the Lord bless you and this parish of St. Patrick, now and for years to come!

Today's readings for this Second Sunday of Lent lend insight into the pastor's role in guiding a parish community. It does so by calling our attention to three mountains all of us must climb, both as individuals and as a parish family. As we climb these three mountains, the pastor is called to show us the face of Christ, to accompany us on this uphill climb, and to help those he accompanies to attract others along the way.

Mount Moriah

The first mountain is Mount Moriah. It was on this mountain that God put Abraham to the test. There he asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. How God's command must have grieved Abraham who loved his son Isaac! As it turned out God did not ask Abraham to kill his son but he did test Abraham's faith, a faith that proved to be unconditional. Because he held nothing back from God, we refer to Abraham as "our father in faith".

What is Mount Moriah for us? For us Mount Moriah is a symbol of those times in our lives when we must face the sorrows and problems of our lives, including those things we don't understand or that seem unfair, those things that bring us sleepless nights, grief in our hearts, those things we just don't see a way of out of. When we are on Mount Moriah we don't want to be alone. We want to be accompanied by someone who possesses a deep, beautiful, and intrepid faith who can guide us and show us the way. Pope Francis urges the pastors of the Church to accompany the people they serve in the challenges of life, both big and small, especially those challenges that demand of us all sacrificial love. So, before anything else, we ask of

those who serve us in the Church – are you a believer? do you trust in God yourself? Today when Father Dale takes the oath of loyalty and leads us in professing the faith, let us not see this as just a part of the installation ritual but as an expression of his living relationship with Christ in the Church, the first prerequisite of a pastor so that he may walk with us as we climb the Mount Moriah's of our lives.

Mount Tabor

The second mountain is Mount Tabor, the Mount of the Transfiguration. St. Mark tells us that after six days, that is, six days after Jesus predicted that he would be put to death, he took Peter, James, and John up the mountain where he was transfigured before their eyes. The humanity of Jesus radiated his glory as the Eternal Son of God. St. Paul would later speak of “the glory of God shining on the face of Christ” – a vision which utterly amazed, even terrified Jesus' closest followers. In the midst of this event, Jesus conversed with Moses and Elijah who represented the entire Old Testament, the Law and the Prophets. The cloud, the visible sign of God's presence among his people overshadowed them, and from the cloud the Father's voice was heard: “This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.”

What is Mount Tabor for us? Thankfully, from time to time all of us have our Mount Tabors. Isn't it in those moments when we feel especially close to God, when the Lord's heart speaks to our hearts? Isn't it those moments when our hearts soar up to the heights of God because through the Holy Spirit we are stuck by the majesty of his glory, the glory of God's self-giving love poured out for us? Yet, Mount Tabor cannot be merely a personal experience. Just as your pastor accompanies you as you climb Mount Moriah, so too he walks with you scale the heights of Tabor. And he does so by opening up for you by word and example, the Word of God. His prayerfulness and fidelity, his example of self-giving love, coupled with his courageous and loving preaching of God's Word lifts us up and places us in the company of Christ, together with Moses and Elijah, so that lost in wonderment we may say, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening!” It is from listening to the Word of God intently, as a community of faith, that the light of God's glory shines on your faces, in your homes, and onto the wider communities where you live and work. It is upon this Mountain that we begin to derive a confident faith that sees beyond the trials we experience on Mount Moriah.

Mount Calvary

There is a third mountain yet to climb, not mentioned by name in today's Scripture, but alluded to by St. Paul in today's reading from the Letter to the Romans, and that is Mount Calvary, where Jesus suffered and died for us all: "If God is for us," St. Paul proclaims, "who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?" (Rom. 8:31).

This is the mountain Jesus told the disciples about six days before the Transfiguration. This is the mountain that you and I climb every time we come to Mass, the Mount of Calvary where the One Sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross is reenacted. Here we come face to face with the price of our salvation, as we receive the Lord whose Body was broken and whose Blood was poured out. Here we encounter in a most powerful fashion Christ's self-giving love, a love which is stronger than our sins and more powerful than death itself. Thus do we die to sins and surrender ourselves to God so that God's glory, shining on the face of Christ, can raise us up.

And so it is that our Pastor accompanies us along the way to Calvary. We are led here Sunday after Sunday, invited to carry in our hearts the sorrows of Mount Moriah and the joys of Tabor to listen to the Word of God and then to share in that love that is like no other. Speaking and acting in the Person of Christ, Head and Shepherd of the Church, Father Dale celebrates the Sacred Liturgy here at beautiful St. Patrick's, with reverence and with joy, so that, atop Mount Calvary, we can enter into Jesus' sacrifice, the One Sacrifice that brings life, redemption, and joy to all the world. So too the Pastor leads you to share in the redeeming love of Calvary when he absolves you of sin in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, anoints you in times of serious illness, and helps you to live your vocation of love day after day, especially the vocation of marriage and family, with all its challenges.

Conclusion

May God bless you, Fr. Picarella, in your ministry as Pastor of St. Patrick's Parish, along with your staff, lay leaders, and parish family. Through your ministry may the light of God's glory shine brightly in this parish, such that it may stand for years to come as a living invitation to all: "Come, let us climb the mountain of the Lord!" May

God bless us and keep us in his love!