

July 10, 2016 11:00 a.m. Holy Family Chapel Nazareth Center

**15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time/Closing Mass for**

**All Michigan Catholic Charismatic Conference 2016**

*(more than 250 people came from Dioceses all across Michigan for this three-day annual conference)*

Dear Sisters of St. Joseph, brothers and sisters in Christ: Praised be Jesus Christ!

I'm so pleased to welcome you to the Diocese of Kalamazoo. I hope that your time here over these last few days in this sacred/holy place has been a time of great blessing for all of you. And I pray that this closing Mass, concluding the All Michigan Catholic Charismatic Conference, is the completion of, what I hope has been, a time of spiritual renewal and refreshment in our Faith, as well as a re-commitment to the Conference Theme: that "**Now is the Time**"----the Time to be receptive to "hearing" God's Saving Word, and the Time to be even more ready to be "proclaimers" of the Good News of Jesus Christ!

Of course God's "Time" is an Eternal "Now"----there is no past or future----In God's Time, He is always Present, and the essence of God's Saving Word is that He (in our view of "time") has done, is doing and will always continue to do everything to make His Saving Word Present to us.

This morning's Sacred Readings for this 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time could not be more appropriate to remind us of that Truth, nor could they be any more appropriate as a way to conclude your annual conference! Our First Reading, from the Book of Deuteronomy, is a perfect example of that.

As you know, the Book of Deuteronomy is the final book of what is known as the Pentateuch in the Old Testament---the first five books that summarizes the very beginning of God's Revelation to us, His human creation. Those first five sacred books recount God's creation of the entire world, including the apex of all creation----the human person----made in the image and likeness of God, with the same abilities of God to love, but also because of the great gift of free will, with the ability to NOT love---to turn away from God----to choose sin over God's ways.

These first five Books teach us that from the very beginning---even immediately after the Original Sin---God did everything He possibly could to call

us back to Him---to re-establish and strengthen the Covenant which God revealed to us, first thru Abraham, then thru Isaac, and Jacob (Israel), and most dramatically through Moses.

Moses---the great Savior of God's People---who led them out of bondage/slavery in Egypt, thru the Desert for 40 years, and right up to the border of the Promised Land---which is where we hear him in today's Reading. In some of his final pleading with his people, since he is near the end of his life and will not be able to accompany his people into the Promised Land, Moses reminds the people how close---how near---how intimate God's Saving Word is to them! God's Word isn't high up in the sky, and they don't have to figure out how to do what (for them) was impossible to fly into the sky to get God's Word; God's Word isn't across the sea.. No---God's Word is already within them---it's in their mouths---in their hearts---in their very souls. And Moses pleads: *"If only you would heed the Voice of the Lord, your God and keep His commandments and statutes...if only you would return to the Lord, your God, (and love Him) with all your heart and all your soul."*

Moses was definitely telling his stubborn and sinful people: ***"Now is the time!"***

But God's people continued to be fickle and foolish and sinful; they didn't pay attention to the Patriarchs, to the Judges, nor the Prophets; they could not seem to grasp how important---how much a matter of spiritual life and death---it was for them to maintain the Covenant with God.

And so, because God's Love for His people is unconditional and unending, God found the perfect way---"*In the fullness of time*"---in the "fullness" of the Eternal Now---God's Word was proclaimed so dramatically that His "*Word became Flesh and dwelt among us*".

And that's what we heard St. Paul reflecting on so beautifully in this morning's 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading from his Letter to the Colossians: *"Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation."* St. Paul also goes on to tell us that even though Jesus is the Word of God made Flesh Who came to not only dwell among us but to bring us salvation through His suffering, death and resurrection, that He is also *"before all things, and in Him all things hold together...and in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell."* Second only to His gift of salvation is the gift that Jesus gave to us of His Church: *"Jesus is the head of the Body, the Church."*

*He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He Himself might be preeminent."*

So, God's Sacred Word today reminds us that God has done absolutely everything that He can do to be present to us and to make us present to Him---- He has sent us Jesus our Savior; He has given us the Church and the Sacraments; He has given us unlimited resources and opportunities to be ONE with Him and with one another. What is our response? What is our choice? When will we decide to fulfill God's commands, and live in His ways, and as Jesus summed up the Law and the Prophets, choose to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength, AND to love our neighbor as we love ourselves?

That's what today's Gospel is all about. One of the Scholars of the Jewish Law, who was clearly more-than-a-little interested in Jesus' teachings, posed a very important question to Jesus. In fact, it's the most important question that every human being must deal with at some point; and it's a question, I hope, that all of us have already asked and have had answered for ourselves: "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*" Being a good Teacher, Jesus answers the question with another question---"*What is written in the Law---how do you read it?*" The scholar, being very scholarly, answered immediately with a very insightful answer---the answer that he clearly had heard Jesus give at some other instruction: to love God completely and to love your neighbor as yourself. But when Jesus told him he was correct, and added "*do this and you will live*",---you will live well in this world, and live in eternal life also----the scholar asked for clarification, but only about the last part: "*And who is my neighbor?*" That's when Jesus taught one of His greatest and most poignant parables: the Parable of the Good Samaritan. We know this parable well. It's clear; it's challenging; it's problematic.

What made this Parable such a problem was that Jesus made a "hated Samaritan" the "hero" of the Parable----not the priest, not the Levite, not even an ordinary Jewish person. No, one of those despised and awful Samaritans! Clearly what Jesus is teaching is that all people are "our neighbors".

The Sisters of St. Joseph who are hosting us these days have made that beautiful insight into the importance of Jesus' basic and essential commands into the very definition of their charism and mission---that we are to see all people as our neighbor----or in their words, "to welcome the good neighbor".

That's easier said than done, isn't it?

We're seeing that graphically displayed in our own country right now as people are divided more deeply now about racial issues than perhaps ever before, and as a growing number of people cannot see beyond the color of another person's skin. We're seeing the awful and heart-breaking violence that this is causing in Baton Rouge, Minneapolis, Dallas, and with demonstrations and protests in many other cities.

If Jesus was telling this Parable today, who might be cast in the place of the Samaritan?

And we're seeing this dramatically being played out in the world with the increasing violence and terrorism in every part of the world. Where some people cannot see beyond religious/ethnic differences----where ISIS has become the most hated and the most feared of all enemies.

The point of Jesus' parable is that if we want to "inherit eternal life", and if we want to fulfill the basic commands of God, to love HIM and to love ONE ANOTHER regardless of the color of their skin or their ethnic background or their religious identity or even their sexual orientation----then we must "*Go, and do the same.*"

We must love our neighbor. We must have compassion for those who are suffering and being mistreated.

When we do that, then we have truly not just "heard" God's Word, but we have "listened" with an open heart. We must be "hearers" and "doers" of God's Word. We must be recipients of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, but also the sharers of those same Gifts. As people who live with an effort to put the Gifts of the Holy Spirit---wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, fortitude, piety and fear of the Lord to good use in our daily lives, must also be people who demonstrate the Fruits of the Holy Spirit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, goodness, modesty, self-control and chastity. And, most importantly, we must always use those gifts and demonstrate those fruits in union with Jesus, the Head of the Body, the Church.

Just two months ago, in May, the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith wrote a joint letter on their behalf and the Congregation for Bishops to all the Bishops of the World entitled: "*On Hierarchical and Charismatic Gifts in the Church*". It's a pretty long letter, but it basically says that the "hierarchical" gifts----that is, those that flow from ordained ministry in the Church, namely teaching, sanctifying and governing----and the "charismatic gifts----that is, those given by

the Holy Spirit to groups or individuals to help them live the faith more intensely and to share the faith with others through evangelical/missionary activity and acts of charity----that both those God-given Gifts must always be in harmony with and complement one another. They are not separate from one another. As all gifts from God, they are given for the good of the Church and for the advancement of the Faith.

This Mass concluding the All Michigan Catholic Charismatic Conference, and all the spiritual good works that all of you are able to do through the Charismatic movement, is a wonderful opportunity for all of us to re-commit ourselves to use the Gifts that God's Holy Spirit bestows upon us----those of us Ordained for ministry in the Church as bishops, priests and deacons, as well as those of you gathered here who heed God's Saving Word NOW to proclaim the Good News of Jesus----all of us must always do what we do for the good of the Church and the spread of the Faith. \_As we heard so beautifully proclaimed in our Psalm Response today: *"Your words, Lord, are Spirit and Life"*.

**Now is the time** to proclaim those words. **Now is the time**, as Jesus shows us, to *"go and do the same"*---to love God and to love our neighbor with compassion and mercy.

God bless you!    Bishop Paul J. Bradley