

Diocese of Kalamazoo/New Evangelization Convocation---Opening Mass

Celebrating Our Lady of Fatima---100th Anniversary of final Apparition

(Readings: Rev. 11:19a, 12:1-6a, 10ab; Psalm 9; Lk. 1:3

October 13, 2017 Hackett Catholic Prep 8:30 a.m.

Praised be Jesus Christ! I look forward to this Conference every year as it deals with such an important topic---New Evangelization; and provides such a wonderful opportunity, especially this year with our Keynote Presenters, Damon and Melanie Owens by whom I am certain you will be inspired, and so many workshops on such a wide variety of helpful topics. Through this opportunity, as we come together as catechists, lay leaders, clergy and lay faithful, may we reflect on, be enriched by, and deepen our love for our faith in Jesus Christ.

The New Evangelization is of great importance to all of us here, but it's critically important for all baptized followers of Jesus----it's an essential part of our vocation as Catholic Christians.

But what is the New Evangelization? We can say what it is by first acknowledging what it is not. It's not a new Gospel; it's not a new revelation of some sort; it's not a new teaching. Each of the last three Holy Fathers have taught us about the importance of the New Evangelization as our need to proclaim the constant message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was Pope St. John Paul II who told us so clearly, that we must proclaim the Gospel "with new ardor, new methods and new expression."

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI went on to clarify: "The New Evangelization is new, not in content, but rather in its inner thrust; new in its methods that must correspond to the times; and new because it is necessary to proclaim the Gospel to those who have already heard it."

But I think Pope Francis has put it so clearly in his amazing Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation entitled "*The Joy of the Gospel*" which not only summarized the powerful insights of the Ordinary Synod of Bishops in 2012, but also contains Pope Francis' foundational teachings and insights as to the direction that the Church needs to be moving during these times of global secularization and an increased sense of more and more people that they have no need for God. Among the powerful insights contained in this teaching, Pope Francis tells us three goals of the New Evangelization: 1) the area of ordinary pastoral ministry----the 25-35 percent who normally come to Mass, and even those who don't come so regularly but still identify

themselves as Catholics; 2) the area of “the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism.....”; 3) the area of preaching the Gospel to “those who do not know Jesus Christ or have rejected Him.” He also points out something that we tend to forget: all people have a right to come to know the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and all Christians have a duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. But, for Pope Francis, the New Evangelization is not so much about proselytizing but about attracting, that is, urging those of us who know and love Jesus to live our lives in such a way that it is obvious to others what, or who, is motivating us in how we act and what we do.

It was this powerful document that was used as the impetus and the basis of the great national Convocation of Catholic Leaders that was held this summer in Orlando from July 1-4. There were more than 3,000 people who attended that Convocation from all over the United States, representatives of every aspect of the life of the Church---bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and lay faithful from more than 150 Dioceses across the country---to spend three days together focusing on the importance of the Gospel, with our personal and intimate relationship with Jesus as the focal point. I’m very proud to say that there were 9 of us who made up the Delegation from the Diocese of Kalamazoo in attendance at that Convocation, and speaking for myself, it was personally enriching and inspiring, and has deepened my own sense of responsibility to do all that we can here to advance the New Evangelization as a true priority for the whole Church here in our Diocese.

But, it’s extremely important for us to keep clear what all this talk about the New Evangelization is all about. To make sure that we know what it is and is not! It is all about Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior; it is all about our relationship with Jesus and our eternal salvation; it is all about finding ways for each of us to share the Joy of the Gospel as we experience it with those who have not experienced it, due to their rejection of the Gospel, their ignorance of the Gospel, or never having had the opportunity to know about the Gospel.

This is what underlies these two days of our Diocesan New Evangelization Convocation, and during this Opening Mass, we pray in thanksgiving for the gift of faith that has been given to us, and for the grace to be renewed and have our faith be reignited so that we can truly be “on fire” with our love for Jesus, and be ready and willing to share the Gospel with others. Or as Pope Francis writes in *“The Joy of the Gospel”*, *“In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization.”* (# 119)

That's a great word: "impelling us". It connotes the sense of "urgency"----the same urgency that "impelled" our dear Blessed Mother in today's Gospel passage to make the Visitation to her cousin Elizabeth.

Just before Mary decided to go visit Elizabeth, the earth-shaking and life-changing event of the Annunciation had taken place. As soon as Mary had given her answer---her Fiat, her complete and total gift of herself in this mission God had just launched to bring salvation to the world---she got ready and went through the mountains to visit her elderly cousin whom the Archangel had let her know was six months pregnant. St. Luke said "she went in haste". This was not a vacation; this was urgent business so she could help Elizabeth in her final three months to bring forth a healthy baby, even though she herself was now pregnant. We heard what happened when these two pregnant women met, not only the joyful acknowledgement of Elizabeth of what was taking place within Mary, but the awareness of what was taking place with her own infant son, who would be John and the one to prepare the way for Jesus' mission, as he leaped for joy in being the first to acknowledge Jesus, the infant Savior.

From the very beginning, dear friends, it's all about the "urgent" mission of sharing the Good News, and it's all about the Joyful leaping/dancing/living that we should experience who know Who Jesus, our Savior, is! That's what we need to experience here and now, in our own lives, in our parishes, in our Diocese, in our world. We have a mission, and it's urgent! There are people who, through no fault of their own, are living, and dying, without knowing who Jesus is. There are people who, through some misguided fault of their own, have ignored Who Jesus is, have forgotten Who Jesus is, or wrongly think they don't need to have Jesus in their lives.

And our Blessed Mother, the most privileged human being to ever live, because of her "Yes"/her "Fiat", and through the power of the Holy Spirit, conceived, bore and gave birth to the Savior of the world, but who even beyond that, was/and remains His most faithful and most joyful Disciple, continues throughout human history with her "urgent mission" of calling the world to turn from sin and live in love with her Son Jesus and His Church. One hundred years and six months ago today, the world came to know the Blessed Mother in a new way as Our Lady of Fatima. Three shepherd children were the ones that Our Lady chose to be her instruments. There was 10 year-old Lucia Dos Santos; 9-year old Francisco Marto; and 7-year old Jacinta Marto!

The year was 1917. The World was in the midst of a horrific World War----concentrated in Europe----35 million people had already been killed, and the numbers were increasing. Just

days before the first apparition, then-Pope Benedict XV pleaded with the Blessed Mother for protection and intercession. It was almost as though Our Lady said: if world leaders won't find a solution to end this war, and if grown-ups won't listen, and change their ways---well, perhaps the Children will listen. On May 13, 1917 at Fatima, Our Lady made her first apparition, and then every month after that on the 13th of the month, for six months. Our Lady's message was simple, yet profound: in order for the world to find peace, there needed to be a change of heart within the hearts of each individual, and a conversion from immorality to purity of mind and heart. From the 7 different prayers that Our Lady taught the children, the one that we know best is the prayer that has now become a part of the Rosary at the end of each decade, known as the Fatima Prayer: "O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of Hell; lead all souls to Heaven, especially those most in need of Your mercy."

And of course, it was on this day, 100 years ago today, when the Miracle of the Sun took place which turned out to be the final apparition at Fatima. Our Blessed Mother presented the world with an urgent message: that we need to turn from our sinful and faithless ways. But she not only came with warnings, but also with solutions. She taught those children, and the whole world, what we might call a 3-point Plan for Peace: 1) protect and celebrate the sanctity of Marriage and Family Life; 2) raise children in the faith... the importance of Catechesis in passing on Faith; 3) pray the Rosary together.

This Diocesan Convocation on the New Evangelization is a big part of that plan, dear Friends, as we come together here to deepen our own Faith and be enriched through these learning opportunities to better equip us in the "teaching mission" entrusted to many of us, and the urgency of being "missionary disciples" which is the responsibility of all of us!

May we always look to our Blessed Mother, Our Lady of Fatima and the Mother of the Church, who is constantly calling us to be faithful and joyful followers of her Son, Jesus. And may we listen to the Voice of God as we heard Him so boldly tell us in today's First Reading from the Book of Revelation: "*Now have salvation and power come, and the Kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Anointed.*"

Now----is the time. It's urgent for us to respond! Salvation has been won for us. The Kingdom of God is here! The Anointed One is the Victor! Let us be One with Jesus and His Church. Let us be joyful, courageous and effective missionary disciples to all we meet on this urgent mission sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ!