

November 4, 2017 6:00 p.m. Vigil Mass St. Augustine Cathedral

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Closing Mass for *Quinto Encuentro* Diocesis de Kalamazoo

I am so happy to be here with you for this very important Mass that observes a historic moment. There is the satisfaction of completing more than seven months of meeting, reflecting, discussing, and proposing ways to proclaim with great conviction and increased zeal our love for Jesus. At the same time, there is the excitement of beginning now to share the insights of what you have learned from all those who have participated in the *Quinto Encuentro* here in our Diocese with the other Dioceses in Region VI, and eventually with the whole Church in the United States.

You have given so much of your time and energy over these past seven months to this process, and you're probably very tired.

But all that you've done, and all the hours that you have invested in the many meetings and discussions have all been about finding ways to advance the New Evangelization here in our parishes, our Diocese, our Region and our Country so that we can share the Good News of Jesus Christ!

Throughout these months of meeting with fellow parishioners and those living among us, I'm sure you have heard people's stories.

People who are living in fear, people who are experiencing injustice, people who don't have enough of life's basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter. People who are struggling to make ends meet and to keep their family together find it hard to experience the love of Jesus or to really "see" Jesus in their lives.

But that is precisely why we need to find ways to help these, our sisters and brothers, to find Jesus----to "encounter" Jesus in the midst of the realities of their life stories----and to help them to know that Jesus accompanies them along their life journey.

And how does Jesus accompany them? Through those of us whose hearts are burning with Love for Jesus; through those of us who know at the depths of our beings how much Jesus loves us; through those of us who are committed to be “missionary disciples” and witnesses of God’s Love to our sisters and brothers who do not know and have not yet encountered Jesus’ love and mercy.

God’s Holy Word that we have just listened to for this 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time is pretty critical of those who are called to be the spiritual leaders of their communities of faith.

In our First Reading, the Old Testament Prophet Malachi speaks directly to the “priests” with a warning that they themselves must be faithful to God and live in God’s ways, and not just tell the people what they are supposed to do.

Jesus delivers a similar message to the Jewish people’s spiritual leaders, the Scribes and Pharisees, and publicly tells the crowds of

people standing around that they should do whatever the Scribes and Pharisees teach them to do, but to NOT follow their example.

Jesus knew that the Scribes were giving the right teaching, but they weren't putting that practice into their own lives.

In other words, they would teach their people how important it was to Love God and Neighbor, which is absolutely right; but, then, they would treat their neighbor terribly, with no evidence of any love for God in their hearts.

Their teaching was "empty"; their words were hollow.

The most effective "teachers" in any of our lives are those who not only "talk the talk" but who also "walk the walk". We will believe someone is telling us the truth if they not only make sense with their words, but also live their lives according to those same words.

Throughout the day today, you've all been working together, and I understand that you have identified areas of pastoral concern which

you will be recommending to me that we as a Diocese work on together over the next two to five years so that we can do a better job of bringing the Gospel to those who are not coming to Church.

I am very grateful to all of you for all your efforts, and I look forward to reviewing these recommendations when the representatives of our Diocesan Encuentro bring them to me.

That is how we can work together to build up God's Kingdom among us here in our Diocese.

Malachi was warning the priests, and Jesus was challenging the Scribes and the Pharisees; but really, just about every adult person here this evening in one way or another has influence over others, and so we all need to take those words of warning very seriously.

Jesus' words that He spoke to the Scribes and Pharisees also speak to me as the Bishop with responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the people of our entire Diocese; or to Father Fabio, Father Daniel (and other pastors) over the lives of the people of their parishes; or

to any parent over the lives of their children. All of you who are parents have a truly awesome responsibility and a powerful influence over the lives of your children. We pray for all of you that you can be truly Godly parents, guided by God's grace.

Parents must make sure that you are teaching your children the Truth about God's love; but even more so, you must make sure that you are providing them good example; not only telling them what to do, but showing them how to live.

In today's Second Reading, St. Paul----the first great "missionary disciple"---reminded the Thessalonians that he had *worked night and day with toil and drudgery proclaiming the Gospel of God to them.*

St. Paul was able to do that, without even counting the cost, because he loved them like a "*nursing mother cares for her children*". What a beautiful and tender image to use. We know that every mother and father will do anything, go anywhere, endure everything for the protection and well-being of their children.

Even though St. Paul never “counted the cost”, we know that his missionary discipleship cost him dearly. He suffered personally in many ways, but his love for Jesus, and his love for his people, was his motivation.

That’s what we need to keep in mind as well. Preaching the Gospel of Jesus has never been easy, and it will not be easy for us either. We need to realize that we can’t possibly do this on our own.

That’s why we need the help and support of one another. We need the graces of the sacraments, and especially the spiritual nourishment of the Holy Eucharist. We need the power of prayer, and in particular the power that comes from Eucharistic Adoration.

We need the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit Who will show us the Way, who will teach us the Truth, and Who will bring us to the fullness of life in Jesus. And we need the tender love and protection of our Blessed Mother, Our Lady of Guadalupe who, just as she said to St. Juan Diego, will remind us: *“Am I not here, Am I not*

your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection, the source of your joy?"

Jesus summed up today's Gospel by telling us what it means to be truly "great" in His way of understanding: *"the greatest among you must be your servant"*.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, this Quinto Encuentro is indeed an "historic moment" for us here in our Diocese to rise to true "greatness" as Jesus defines it. Let us truly "encounter" the Lord Jesus in the Breaking of the Bread, in the Truth of His Word, in the love of His Church, in the grace of His Sacraments, and in the guidance of His Holy Spirit.

As we prayed in tonight's Psalm Response: *"In You, O Lord, I have found my peace."* All the efforts that have gone into this Diocesan Encuentro are worth it if they have helped us to find---to encounter--and to share with all we meet----the One Who is our Peace, and the One Who makes us truly great in His sight!