

October 10, 2021

3:00 p.m.

St. Clare, Centreville

**Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time/60th Anniversary of
Establishment/Jubilee Visit**

Comments at Beginning of Mass:

I'm so very glad grateful to Father Mathias for inviting me to be here with you on this beautiful October afternoon. I'm so pleased to join with you in celebrating the 60th anniversary of this Parish's establishment on Oct. 1, 1961. I'm also thrilled to be able to visit you once more, since my last visit was a couple years ago. So it's great to be making my Pastoral Visits to as many parishes as I can just to spend some time together celebrating our Faith. In addition to your parish's 60th Jubilee, as you know, this is also a special "Year" for our Diocese. On July 21st, we celebrated our 50th Anniversary of the establishment of our Diocese by Pope St. Paul VI in 1971, creating a new Diocese from areas that until then belonged either to the Diocese of Grand Rapids or the Diocese of Lansing (as you did). So, Happy Anniversary to US!

This is also a "special year" because on August 29th, on the Feast of our Diocesan Patron St. Augustine, I announced a "Jubilee Year of the Holy Spirit". In reality this "special year" is really only 9 months, to be concluded next Pentecost. So, I think we should all think about this "Year of the Holy Spirit" as a *9-month Novena*. I hope that during this special "Year", every Catholic will pray every day to be "renewed", "re-energized", and "in-spired" by asking the Holy Spirit to do for us, what He did for the Apostles on that first Pentecost. They were completely transformed from fearful men hiding behind the locked doors of the Cenacle, into fearless, ardent, bold, convicted, and incredibly effective witnesses to their Faith in Jesus, and their faithfulness to the mission Jesus had entrusted to them.

That is the same mission entrusted to us thru our Baptism and Confirmation---to advance the Kingdom of God that Jesus had come to initiate.

For all those reasons, I'm very pleased to be here with you this morning on this 28th Sunday of the Year to celebrate our Faith together, praying that the Holy Spirit will fill us with His Gifts..... Therefore, as we prepare

Homily:

Today's Scripture Readings provide us with some challenging questions and an opportunity to reflect on what is most important to each of us in our lives.

In today's First Reading from the Book of Wisdom, we heard a beautiful reflection on the quality of Wisdom. As you know, that is an essential Attribute of God, but in Scripture, that Attribute is often-times "personified" and given a Feminine characteristic. That's why we heard the constant references to how the Wisdom writer "preferred her" more than anyone or anything else. The Holy Author wrote: *I prayed...I pleaded...I preferred Her*". *"She is more important than scepter, throne, riches, gold, silver, health or beauty."* So, we too need to ask ourselves: what is most important in our life, what is of lasting value? It is the Wisdom that we receive from God's Holy Spirit that helps us, in the midst of our journey of faith, to remember that all the "*things of this world*", all the "*material possessions*" we happen to amass throughout our lives, all the accomplishments we achieve---none of that matters if we have not been "wise" and "prudent" enough to live our lives in rightful relationship with God by living according to God's ways throughout our lives.

In today's Gospel passage, we hear the very familiar story of "the Rich Young Man". He seemed to have it all: he had youth, possessions, good health---and yet, he knew there was "more" And so he ran up to Jesus as He was journeying along the road, knelt right down on the ground, and asked his question. Maybe he was rich because he had "inherited" all his wealth from his family; and now, he wonders how he can "inherit" what he knows to be the "lasting wealth" of eternal life? And so he asked: *"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

The conversation that went on between Jesus and the Young Man is very important---a "back and forth" dialogue---a kind of one-on-one seminar that we get to listen in on which reveals that we don't just have Eternal Life given to us without a conscious effort on our part to embrace it even now, as we choose to live in God's ways.

Listening to God's Word which challenges us with questions about what is of lasting value, and encountering the Lord Himself with the ultimate questions of life---THAT is what St. Clare Parish is all about. When we, as People of Faith, celebrate the Eucharist, when we come here to be instructed in our Faith, to be supported by the community of Faith, and to be motivated to live our Faith with

Joy in our daily activities and responsibilities, that's when THIS Parish, or any Parish, is living up to what it's purpose is.

When the Rich Young Man asked that most important question, Jesus didn't try to "sell" him a slick package of goods just so that he would sign up to be one of His followers. St. Mark told us that "*Jesus looked at him, loved him*" ---then, He told him the Truth: keep the Commandments----live according to the teachings of your Faith--- divest yourself of the control of possessions-----and follow Me.

So, do our possessions possess us? Are we making "wise" use of our possessions to help us live good, faith-filled, generous lives as joyful witnesses of Jesus in this world, or are they weighing us down, like an over-packed Camel that could never get through the proverbial "eye of a needle"? Our Faith is not about finding easy ways to live our lives, or finding shortcuts to get to Heaven. Our Faith is challenging, and it takes a lifetime of conversion----a lifetime of practice before we get it right. Jesus Himself tells us that it's difficult---"*Children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God.*"

It's not "hard" because it's so complicated; actually it's very simple: love God, love your neighbor, serve the needs of others in the example of Jesus. What's hard about that is for us to come to the point of choosing to turn away from complacency that comes from material comforts, and to cleanse ourselves of sinful practices, so that we can follow Jesus and live in harmony with others.

Jesus is very clear with the Young Man, and all of us, that we have to make some difficult choices if we want to "follow Him". He also tells us: "*For human beings, it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God.*"

If we try to do things on our own, we'll never be able to make it. BUT, if, as we heard in today's First Reading, we "*pray and plead and prefer*" God's Spirit of Wisdom more than anything else---if we choose to allow God to guide us through the Church, and in particular, through the Sacramental Life we experience here at the Parish, we will find the way to eternal life.

Pope Francis has described the life of Faith as lived out in the Parish in this way: "*The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory; it is...a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach.*"

St. Clare Parish, along with St. Barbara Parish and Immaculate Conception Parish as a Collaborative of Parishes, make up the Presence of the Church here in this part of the Diocese of Kalamazoo. You form that “community of communities” that Pope Francis spoke of. For 60 years, through the leadership of 15 Pastors, and a number of Bishops, the Faithful of St. Clare Parish have celebrated your faith, reached out in charitable outreach to those in need, and passed on your faith to your children and their children. You have a strong reputation for that virtue of Hospitality and Welcoming that is so important for any Christian community. And, in spite of many challenges, on January 24, 2019, I had the great privilege of consecrating this brand new church---a tribute to your hard work, perseverance and the fulfillment of a 20-year dream and need.

But there are always more challenges to meet, aren't there? It's clear that we have many challenges to face, and address in the years to come. Our greatest challenge these days may very well be in reaching out to those of our families and community who have fallen away from the practice of the faith. There is also the challenge to help our young people to not be detoured along their life journey in pursuit of a life of possessions or pleasures of other sorts. Pope Francis challenges us to go out to the peripheries---to the margins of society---to those who have never heard the Good News of the Gospel, and give witness to our Faith---in other words, to become Evangelizers. And more and more these days, our great challenge is to be willing to stand up for and defend the Faith in an increasingly secularized and divided society that appears to want nothing to do with God.

Today's celebration of all that has taken place here in this parish over the last 60 years is a wonderful moment of joy. But there is so much more to do.

As I mentioned at the beginning of our Mass this morning, our Diocese has just recently begun a special “Jubilee Year of the Holy Spirit”. It is my great hope that ALL of us will use these 9 months as a time of prayer to be renewed in our Faith, and to have our hearts be reignited with our Love for God and Neighbor, so that we can be re-energized as Spirit-filled, joyful missionary disciples of Jesus, rooted in the Eucharist, and with our hearts “on fire” with our Love for Jesus.

I see this as a special **Year of Grace**, filled with wonderful possibilities for our Diocese. I believe this can be, and needs to be, a time of Spiritual Renewal for our Local Church. And that begins to take place in every parish, small and large, as we try to find ways to “go out to the peripheries” and invite people to come to

celebrate what you have found here---the “key” to lasting happiness, and the “greatest Possession” of all.

But of course, before it begins in the parish, it must begin within each of our hearts---to ask the Lord, as the Rich Young Man did: “*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*”, and then to listen as Jesus reveals to us what “*one thing (or more) we might be lacking*”---and then, to have the courage to follow through.

As today’s Second Reading reminds us: “*God’s Word is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword....and exposed to the eyes of Him to Whom we must render an account.*”

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us “listen” for what Jesus is telling us. That can only happen if we each spend more time in prayer each day, asking the Holy Spirit to guide us---to show us the way---to remind us of the Mission of the Church that has been entrusted to us---to live the Good News of Jesus effectively in our daily lives, and to be joyful witnesses of that Good News to all those we meet. Let us also make our Prayer today’s beautiful Psalm Refrain: “*Fill me with Your Love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!*”

Let us pray that the same Spirit Who empowered the Apostles to go into the world, will also keep filling us with those same **Gifts**, so that our lives will bear the **Fruits** of Jesus’ Love to all we meet.

Finally, let us give thanks today for this great Parish---for all those who have gone before us who worked so hard to provide this “community of communities:”, this “sanctuary”. May St. Clare Parish be blessed and continue to be the place where people of all ages and for generations to come will be able to ask the questions such as “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” and to be able to encounter our Loving Lord Who looks at each of us with love and assures us that as long as we stay close to Him, and follow Him, “all things are possible with God.”

God bless you!