

November 6, 2021 9:00 a.m. Fetzer Center

Diocesan New Evangelization Convocation/Votive Mass of Holy Spirit

(Readings of the Day: Rom. 16:3-9,16,22-27; Ps. 145; Lk. 16:9-15)

Once again, I am very happy to greet all of you with great warmth, affection, and gratitude for your presence here on this beautiful, early Saturday November morning. I am very pleased that you've been able to come from all around the Diocese to spend an entire day of enrichment and education to grow in your Faith; and I'm particularly grateful to welcome those who will help us to grow and learn, Dr. William Keimig from the Catechetical Institute at Franciscan University, and Mr. Chris McKenna from Grand Rapids.

And if I was on the ball and we had the time, I'd love to greet each and every one of you by name, because when we do that----when we acknowledge one another with the particular love and respect that Jesus wants us to have for each other----when we can see one another as the unique, special and valued individuals we are: then, we are truly seeing one another as God sees us.

That's what we heard St. Paul doing in today's First Reading. As he was concluding his Letter to the Romans---a Church that he fostered, encouraged, and had many of his own disciples working hard to develop, but which he hadn't really visited yet---he went out of his way to mention everyone that he knew by name: Prisca and Aquila (who were pretty much his chief Catechists); Epaenetus, the first convert to the Faith; along with several women, including Mary and Junia, listed among the group referred to as "apostles"; Ampliatus, Urbanus, Stachys, and even those who were with Paul during one of his several times held in prison. And for those he didn't mention by name, he included by saying "the Church (who meets) at the house of Prisca and Aquila". Even the scribe, Tertius, who is writing this Letter for Paul gets in the act and "greet (everyone) in the Lord", along with Gaius, his host, and Erastus, the city treasurer. Paul went out of his way to mention people by name, because he was teaching the Church in Rome, and all of us who reflect on these words 2,000 years later, that our Faith is about more than dogmas of belief; it's all about the importance of "relationships". The first, and most important relationship of all, of course, being with Jesus our Lord, which results from our Baptism into Jesus Christ; and then, immediately after that, flows the vital relationships that we need to have, foster, and grow in with one another, members of the Body of Christ. In the 5 verses that were skipped in that first

Reading this morning, St. Paul also very directly tells the Romans who NOT to greet---those with whom they should not associate---those who are interested only in “stirring up divisions”, and those who “bring up difficulties about the teachings of the Gospel”.

In the Gospel passage we just heard, Jesus says something that might be surprising; He says: “*Make friends with dishonest wealth*”; but only so that, as Jesus goes on, “*when it fails*” (as it most certainly will do) you will come to realize that what is “eternal” is all that matters. And then He makes His main point: “*No servant can serve two masters.....*” He then amplifies on that---we will either love and be devoted to one, which means that we can only hate/despise the other. We can’t love them both equally. So, Jesus concludes: “*You cannot serve God and mammon.*” The Pharisees----who professionally were supposed to be devoted to God, but who secretly loved themselves and their own power and authority more, and who St. Luke tells us “*loved money*”----didn’t challenge Jesus; St. Luke just tells us: they just “*sneered at Him.*” That tells us a lot.

So, both passages from God’s Holy Word we’ve just heard this morning remind us about the primacy of the Relationship that we must have with God, Who is the One we are to serve; and the best and principal way for us to serve God is through our service to one another. The true “wealth” that we have been given is in the form of the charisms, the gifts and talents, that we have been given, and how we use those gifts to help build up the Body of Christ.

This New Evangelization Convocation, and the ministries that we encourage and promote through our Diocesan Institute of Missionary Discipleship, supported and empowered by the Catechetical Institute of Franciscan University, aim at supporting you----our lay parish leaders and pastoral ministers----by building up the particular charism or gift you have received from the Holy Spirit to serve the needs of the Church at the parish, Collaborative or Diocesan level. You all do that in such a variety of ways: as parish secretary, members of Parish or Diocesan Pastoral Councils, Parish or Diocesan Finance Councils, Business Managers, Youth Ministers, Catechists, Deacons and Priests. And we at the diocesan level make every effort to accompany you in providing you with the tools to be trained and certified in the areas in which you are serving in your journey of being a Joyful Disciple of Jesus Christ.

As you remember, this past Spring, Pope Francis instituted a new lay ministry of catechist, and issued an Apostolic Letter entitled “*Antiquum Ministerium*”

(Ancient Ministry). In that Letter, Pope Francis wrote that “From the beginning, the Christian community was characterized by many different (charisms) forms of ministry, carried out by men and women who, obedient to the working of the Holy Spirit, devoted their lives to the building up of the Church.” (AM, #2)

That’s part of what was going on when St. Paul was greeting and encouraging those first-generation Christians in the House Church meeting in the home of Prisca and Aquila in Rome. And that’s what we continue to do in various ways and through many other ministries, 2,000 years later here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo.

As I wrote in my newly-issued Pastoral Letter to all of you, entitled “***Let our Hearts be In-spired for Mission: A Pastoral Letter on the Holy Spirit***” (which you’ll receive later today), “A ‘charism’ is a gift we receive from the Holy Spirit, given to individuals or groups within the Church for the purpose of building up the Church and enriching the life of the Spirit within her. They are intended to gather, sanctify, and renew life in the Church and in the world.” Whatever you are doing, in your parish, your Collaborative, your School, in your diocesan ministry----when you do that with the Love of Jesus-----you are helping to “build up the Church and enriching the life of the Spirit within her”.

As I also wrote in my Pastoral Letter: “My hope for every Catholic in the Diocese of Kalamazoo (and I say that in a special way to everyone gathered here this morning) is that we will be re-energized as Spirit-Filled evangelizers, individual members of our diocesan-wide community of missionary disciples who are Eucharistically-centered and “on fire” with the Power of the Holy Spirit.”

My dear Collaborators in our Work for the Church, we are at an extremely important moment, and I firmly believe that our Loving God is presenting us with a confluence of amazing opportunities. We have just celebrated our 50th Anniversary as a Diocese; we are in the midst of the “Jubilee Year of the Holy Spirit”; and our Holy Father has called us, and every Diocese around the world, to a time of “Synodality”, which simply means to focus on listening: listening to the Holy Spirit and asking Him, prayerfully, where He is leading us as a Diocese/as a Local Church; and listening to one another---not just those who come to Church with us, or who participate in our ministries and programs. Yes, of course, we need to listen to them. BUT also, and perhaps more importantly, we need to figure out a way to “listen” to those who are NOT coming to Church, who don’t

care about our programs/ministries----to those who, as hard as it may be to believe, don't know Jesus Christ.

And that takes us back to what our Readings are reminding us this morning----the basics of our Faith. Yes, we need to know the teachings of our Faith! Yes, we need to understand the meaning of our Sacraments, and the beauty and wonder of the Mass, and the special Gift that the Eucharist is for our spiritual journey. Yes, we need to know what the "spiritual rules" for living our lives are---to abide by the Commandments. BUT, we also need to know and love Jesus, as our Lord and Savior; we need to know, and be moved in our hearts, by gratitude to Jesus for what He has done for YOU and for ME---that He has shed His Precious Blood and given His Body---that He has suffered and died, and then Rose again victorious over Sin and Death forever, and has best of all, given us a share in that Victory. THAT's the Jesus we need to know, and Love, and follow. Jesus told us that when all is said and done, only two things really matter: to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength; and to love one another as Jesus loves us! That's the entire Law and the Prophets---that's all that ultimately and eternally matters.

And that, dear sisters and brothers in Christ, is the most important part of any of the Ministries in which we participate. We need to **prayerfully Listen** to the Holy Spirit's direction; we need to **open our hearts** to receive the **Gifts** that the Holy Spirit so desperately wants to give us, being mindful that those Gifts will transform our lives, just as they transformed the Apostles' lives, and sent them forth on the Mission to change the world. And, when we receive those Gifts of the Holy Spirit, we need to **allow our Lives to give evidence of the Fruits** of the Spirit in all that we say and do: to show the world, our Diocese, our Parish, and our Families the Love, Joy, Kindness, Peace, Patience, Goodness, Generosity, Gentleness, Faithfulness, Modesty, Self-Control, and Chastity.

Let us not only "greet" one another by name, or "offer one another a holy kiss", but let us listen to one another; let us love one another; let us do what we do for one another because of our Love for Jesus, Who, as He told us at the end of today's Gospel passage: "*knows our hearts*"---and still loves us!

With St. Paul, let us pray: "*Now to Him who can strengthen you, according to my Gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ....made known to all nations, to bring about the obedience of faith, to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ: be glory forever and ever. Amen!*"