

July 18, 2021

11:00 a.m.

St. Rose of Lima Parish Visit

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time**At Beginning of Mass:**

As we begin this Mass on the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, I have no doubt that your hearts, and those of everyone who calls St. Rose of Lima Parish their Spiritual Home, are heavy with sorrow over the tragic fire that has so badly damaged your beloved parish church.

I can tell you that when I received Fr. Stephan's phone call before 5:00 a.m. on Tuesday morning, my heart sank, and I became instantly united with all of you in my prayerful concern over those next hours of waiting to learn the scope of the problems and of the level of destruction. At my request, Msgr. Osborn immediately came to support Fr. Stephan and to see first-hand what the situation was. After sending me a number of photos, I could see that the damage was significant. I immediately thanked God that no one was hurt, that the Blessed Sacrament was protected and kept safe, that the damage was not worse, and... that "the Church" remains strong.

Although the beautiful historic structure which we call St. Rose of Lima is a church building where you all gather regularly to worship God and celebrate faith, we always have to keep in mind that a "building" is not the Church. WE are the Church----WE are the "living stones" of the Body of Christ. And as long as our Faith remains strong in Jesus, Who is our Strength---THEN the Church "remains strong", even if the building is damaged, and our worship space becomes the Parish Hall for an extended period of time. When you're gathered together here, this is the Church.

That's why I wanted to come here to celebrate Mass with you this morning so that, together---bishop, pastor, deacon, and lay faithful---we can celebrate the Faith that unites us, and so that we can place ourselves, once more, into the Provident Care of our Loving God. He IS with us in the most intimate and powerful ways possible: in His Word that we will very soon hear proclaimed, and in the precious Gift of the Eucharist to be the spiritual Food and Drink to sustain us, nourish us, and comfort us as we continue our journey of Faith.

And so, even with our hearts as heavy as they are because of this sad moment in this parish's history, along with whatever other burdens or worries that any of us might be carrying, let us celebrate WHO we are this morning---we are People of Faith in our God Who loves us, and is with us always.

Homily:

It always amazes me how the Readings from God's Holy Word, which are selected and assigned for the universal Church for the 52 Sundays, major holydays, and weekday celebrations of our Liturgical Calendar, always seem to be exactly what we need to hear. And I don't think that could be any truer than it is today, for this particular community of Faith, gathered together for worship on this particular day!

As I mentioned at the beginning of our Mass, our hearts are heavy as we are gathered here, in particular about the damage done to the beloved parish church of St. Rose, along with whatever other specific worries any of us might be carrying. In those sad moments of our life, we need a strong shoulder to lean on; we need a compassionate ear to listen; we need a loving shepherd to care for us. The "strong shoulder", the "compassionate ear", the "loving Shepherd" is Jesus! That's what St. Mark tells us in today's Gospel Reading we just heard proclaimed. Jesus saw the crowds who had followed Him and, even though He and His Apostles were trying to find a place and some time for their own rest, He chose to look at them and care about their needs. In fact, Mark tells us something very beautiful; that *"His heart was moved with pity for them for they were like sheep without a shepherd"*.

My dear people, I'm here to tell you that's exactly what Jesus sees in us---His Sacred Heart is moved with pity, concern and love. Just like Jesus had invited His Apostles----*"Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while"*, He says the same thing to us: *"Come away (with Me) and rest in My Love"*. That's

what we're doing here today, and every time we gather as "the Church in worship"; we take ourselves away from the schedules, problems, involvements, activities, distractions of our daily lives so that we can become "renewed" in Jesus.

The other point that speaks to us so directly today, again learning directly from Jesus, is to see that He chose to turn what might have been a minor disappointment into a great opportunity to share God's Love. He and His Apostles were looking forward to a bit of a "day off" ----to rest in a quiet place so that Jesus could hear all about the Apostles' first "missionary journey" that they had just returned from, and were so excited to share. But then, the people figured out where they were going, and took the shortcut, and were there waiting for them when the boat docked. But, Jesus didn't get upset; He didn't send them away or tell them to come back tomorrow, after their "day off". No, He loved them, embraced them and responded to their needs, right then and there.

What you have encountered here this week is a HUGE disappointment and a major heartache. But we can't let these kinds of awful events turn us sour on life or overwhelm us. Instead, like Jesus, we need to see them as opportunities, and make every effort to deal with this situation, and every other unexpected "curve ball" that life might throw us, as faith-fully and patiently as we can, knowing that Jesus is right here to help us through it all.

And what did Jesus do? He didn't miraculously take away all their problems. No, they still went home to those problems. What He did, as St. Mark tells us, was: "*He began to teach them many things.*" In other words, He led them in what we call "the Liturgy of the Word"---He taught them that God loved them, that God was with them; He taught them what God wanted them to do, and how God wanted them to live.

That's a huge part of why we come to Mass---to do the same thing; to allow ourselves to "be taught many things" by the God Who loves us, and Who knows us better than we know ourselves. God knows what makes us happy; God knows how we can live together in peace. God wants to "teach us", but we have to be willing to listen---to follow the direction---to put aside our pride and stop following the latest fads, and "come to Jesus and rest in His love."

Do you know what the very next line in Mark's Gospel is? We didn't hear it this morning---our passage ended with v. 34 of the 6th chapter; but do you know what v. 35 is? The miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. So, the first thing Jesus did was to feed their souls and their minds with God's Word; but the second thing He did was to feed their bodies---to provide them with food to strengthen them for their journey back home from that "deserted place".

That's the other huge part of why we come to Mass. Besides allowing Jesus to "teach us about many things"----feeding our minds and opening our hearts to God's Love----we then enter into the most sacred Mystery of the Eucharist, and experience how deeply our God desires to be so intimate with us that He gives us His own Body and Blood---He becomes our spiritual Bread and Drink, to feed us spiritually along our journey of Faith. Jesus' Heart is always moved when He sees us, and will always respond according to our need. He loves us with the Heart of the Good Shepherd; He will protect us, defend us, and do everything He can to keep us united with the rest of the Flock, because He knows that staying with Him is the best way to avoid being led astray, getting lost, or dying in our sins.

In today's Second Reading from the Letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul used another description for Jesus. He said: *"He is our Peace...He breaks down the walls that divide us by enmity...He reconciles us with one another and with God.....It is through Jesus that we have access in one Spirit to the Father."*

Jesus is the answer to our questions; He is the solution to our problems; He is the Forgiveness we so desperately need for our sins, and the Gift of our Salvation. But....we have to accept His invitation to "Come away with Me and rest in My Love." When life gets difficult, when big problems come into our lives, when there's a huge disappointment like this Church fire, or any of the personal family crises many of you are coping with right now-----that's not the time to walk away from Jesus. In fact, there's never a right time to do that. We need to "come to Jesus"----run to Jesus---stay with Jesus. Open yourselves to Him so that He can teach you many things, feed you and keep you strong along the long, beautiful, and occasionally very painful journey of life we are traveling.

The "icing on the cake", so to speak, about why today's Scripture Readings are SO appropriate for us today is because today's Psalm, Psalm 23, is the one that

the whole world turns to in our worries, needs, fears, and sorrows. *“The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.”* How appropriate is that!?

Dear Family of Faith, our Lord is our Shepherd; our God is with us. Let us fervently pray that the damage caused by this awful fire will be fully repaired as soon as possible. But equally important, let us also pray that you, the People of God who make up this Parish Family, will continue to gather together---wherever that happens to be---to keep allowing Jesus to teach you many things” and also to be fed with His Body and Blood, so that you can continue to faithfully carry out the mission of loving service to others in the Name of Christ, the mission that Jesus gives us every time we receive this most Precious Gift of the Eucharist.

The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.....Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.”