

THE CHURCH AT A NEW FRONTIER

Greetings in the Lord to all of you as we gather together on this special day. As members supporting the Catholic Foundation, we are mindful of our special mission that especially comes to us in memories of our past, our celebration of the moment, and our vision for the future. For obvious reasons, Cardinal Francis George, OMI, our beloved friend and brother, a former Bishop of this Diocese in Central Washington, could not be with us today. No doubt he is with us in spirit, as are so many who have gone before us. Their heritage, which we enjoy today, provides us a wonderful opportunity to thank God for gracious gifts, for generosity, and for the witness of faith.

“The Church at a New Frontier.” We think of frontier, and we often think of the pioneers of our own nation’s history – the westward expansion, taming the wilderness. The word suggests hardship, sacrifice, and even suffering.

Some would suggest there are no real frontiers left anymore. Technology allows us to chart each and every square inch of the globe, both land and sea. Telescopes positioned in space can focus on a sidewalk in Roslyn and read the date the concrete was poured. Scientists map DNA sequences, revealing the primal building blocks of God’s intricate creations. Is there anything left?

I would argue, Yes. And tonight, I would like to suggest to you a little broader understanding of that word frontier. At its very heart, frontier is a challenge, and frontier is an opportunity. A frontier confronts us with a choice: We can risk moving forward into the unknown, to see what there is to be seen, to learn what there is to learn, or we can remain stagnant, apathetic, and complacent. We can leave our light under a bushel basket.

Although the Catholic Diocese of Yakima was officially established in 1951, this area has a rich history of faith that began with the courageous witness and commitment of the Oblates, the Jesuits, several communities of women Religious, and families. Of course, that particular moment of new beginnings in the mid-1800s must be considered in the context of our Native American brothers and sisters, who were already here for untold generations, and who have greatly contributed to our society by their culture and sensitivity to the land and its beauty.

We look to the past with great appreciation. This diocese has grown to include 41 parishes and some 80,000 Catholics. Six bishops have been privileged to serve here. It was my great honor to be your fourth bishop. The Church has been enriched by the migration of peoples. The diocesan community of faith has grown with a wonderful diversity. We bishops in the Northwest rejoice in our brother and your bishop with a Hispanic background.

That diverse diocesan community takes its place within the Church Universal. Television, Internet, mobile communications of all kinds: modern technology allows the Church to discover herself, and to see herself, in ways never before possible. Technology most assuredly opens a new frontier, not just for scientists, but for all of us.

Let me tell you a story. I had the remarkable experience of landing in Rome just before the death of Pope John Paul II. I walked through St Peter’s Square on the afternoon before the evening of his death. Word had flashed around the globe that the Holy Father was spending his last moments on Earth. I spent an hour there, praying with tens of thousands of others who had gathered in solidarity, bound by common concern and common faith. The sense of prayerful unity demonstrated the powerful sense of being Church, together, and expressing a love for a great shepherd who meant so much to us and to the world. It was a tremendous experience.

The following week was another memorable experience.

As the world prepared for his funeral, hundreds of thousands of people poured into Rome. Many of the pilgrims were quite young. The vast majority of the gathering crowd consisted of laity, ordinary folks from around the globe. Everyone, young and old, demonstrated a common solidarity of belief in the Kingdom of God, a common hope in the transformation that occurs from suffering, to death, to resurrection. Over a half a million of people gathered in the city of Rome for the funeral liturgy. You probably watched this remarkable moment on television, a moment of world history, with an impact around the Earth: a moment that combined celebration, and prayer, and grief over a departed brother in Christ. Hundreds of thousands of people gathered around the altar that day. In a very real sense, the rest of the world gathered there as well, participating in a new way, advancing a new frontier.

In the days that followed, the world waited for a new shepherd to be elected. The journalists were fascinated by the process as the Cardinals gathered in Rome. Who would be elected pope? It had been over twenty-five years since the last election. I happened to walk into a TV station in Spokane for an interview and noticed that the staff was watching one of the monitors which was focused on the smokestack in the Sistine Chapel. Think of it: something as fragile and temporary as a wisp of smoke can signal such exciting and surprising news. The announcement revealed by the smoke was transmitted instantaneously around the globe. Finally, the Papal baton was passed to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, and we now embrace a new chapter of Church history, under the guidance of Pope Benedict XVI.

The election of Pope Benedict was a great surprise. As a few leaped to judgment about him, some caricatures were less than charitable. Yet soon we all encountered the depth of his theological and intellectual insight, his gentle way of speaking the truth about reality, his challenge to us to be ever more faithful followers of Jesus. Our Holy Father is a remarkable witness to the ministry of Jesus. His more recent visit to Spain is an example. There has been considerable tension there lately, between Church and State, particularly over ethical issues. He faced a true frontier, an intellectual frontier. His visit might well be difficult. How did he meet the challenge? He spoke the truth, and he spoke that truth with compassion and love. He was sensitive to people, even those who disagreed with him. He expressed hope for the future and a profound love for all people. He created an atmosphere of truth and joy, where he could speak the reality of God's love.

His encyclical "Deus Caritas Est" provides an astounding and powerful reflection on God's call to love. He reflected on God's great love for us, our response to love God in return, and finally, the responsibility that we have to love one another. His reflection on the love between husband and wife helps us appreciate this sacrament – not just for husbands, wives, and families, but for the entire Church. He addresses the challenge of loving our neighbor, and places that challenge directly in context of the Eucharist. As Jesus tells us in the Gospel of John after washing the feet of the Apostles at the Last Supper: "As I have done, so you must do." Eucharist celebrated is also Eucharist lived in action. The Eucharist compels us to go forth with the Good News of God's love, even to the ends of the Earth. Strengthened by Eucharist, we can squarely confront the frontier of a world in desperate need of God's saving love.

Certainly, the papal transition has had its impact on the life of the Church, and will have, for years to come. Yet there are other realities which have had a significant impact on our life as Church.

First and foremost, the sexual abuse crisis has shaken the Church to the core of her being. The experience is painful and devastating. It also has served as a wake-up call for the Church. One of the most important lessons we have learned is that the Church must be in a constant state of renewal, a constant state of conversion. Sexual abuse has damaged the Church not just in the United States, but in other countries as well such as Canada, Ireland, and Austria. We all hope that the long process of healing has started to take root. That process truly began here in the United States with the painful acknowledgment of what has occurred.

One thing we bishops chose to do was to determine as best we could the nature and scope of the problem of the abuse in the Catholic Church here in the United States. That effort resulted in what is known as the “John Jay Study.” We wanted to make sure that the steps we were taking to heal the problem would be effective. The results of that study included 52 years of diocesan records providing the evidence that the actual occurrence of abuse reached its high point in the 1970s and ’80s, and then had a sharp decline in the 90’s. While new reports of past abuse continue to come forward, it is extremely unlikely that there is a significant amount of abuse occurring today that will not be reported until years from now.

The depth of the crisis has called for a radical, equally profound response.

I believe that certain measures taken by the bishops contributed to this decline of incidents of abuse, and I would identify two in particular. One is the more professional screening of candidates for the seminary and greater attention to issues of human formation throughout a candidate’s training. This may well have kept away from Holy Orders some who would have abused their trust. The other is the development in dioceses of sexual abuse policies which provided for prompt dealing with these allegations, and thus prevention of further abuse.

The Charter for the Protection of Youth and Children, along with Norms approved by the Holy See which implement the Charter, has truly been groundbreaking work in the Church – an urgent move to confront that frontier. The statistics of abuse leave us deeply saddened. On the other hand, in the final analysis, I firmly believe that the truth of this situation will be a grace and a blessing to the Church.

But while we may have a well founded hope that the measures are in place to prevent this abuse as far as humanly possible, that which happened in the past casts a continuing shadow in many ways. For one thing, the financial situation of several dioceses, my own included, stands to be adversely affected for many years by the litigation now underway. As important as that is, there are more important consequences, such as the effect of the crises has had on the relationship between bishops and the faithful, between all the clergy and the faithful, between bishops and their priests, between the Church and the civil government with the entanglement brought about by litigation, and between the Church and the United States and the Holy See. And we in the United States are not alone. Not just the Church, but the world is awakening to a situation that has been ignored for too long. No description of a new frontier for the Church can ignore the continuing effect of this crisis.

The reality has been painful for all of us who love the Church, but especially painful for those who have lived with the abuse for so many years. We must allow our healing Savior to touch us. We can do that through reconciliation, and through structures designed, to the best of our ability, to protect our children and vulnerable adults. The truth is, Christ continues to be our Redeemer – yesterday, today and forever. As victims gain the courage and the strength to come forward and name the tragedies of the past, I hope the truth will be a source of purification of the Church, and a source of our firm resolve: We must never let this happen again. Children everywhere are a precious commodity. They must be protected and they must be supported, by the Church, and by the rest of society.

Each of us – laity, clergy, Religious – each of us is a disciple of Jesus. Our lives of faith are centered in the Good News of the Gospel. God’s gift of the Eucharist feeds us, strengthens us, and compels us to share the gift of God’s Son with a world that is in desperate need of what we have to give.

Look at the challenges we face. The threat of Communism certainly has diminished as a world-wide threat. Still we encounter other challenges to our faith: culture wars; fanaticism; terrorism; ethical and religious alienation at home and abroad. Each of these provides us with a very real frontier, an opportunity for exploration, for learning, for teaching. But when you think about it, at their heart, are these challenges any different from those faced by the early missionaries to this part of the world? They came to this land to begin and build a Church. They were accompanied by families, who were strengthened by their resolve to fulfill a dream.

Migrants then and now came to seek a better life. The Spirit touched their lives in ways that were mysterious and surprising. Truly, they were on a mission. Truly, they confronted a frontier.

All of us have stories. My own story is about a father who left Norway at 17 years of age to begin anew here, and a mother who migrated from Minnesota to this State along with her family for a new beginning. Isn't it interesting to see how the movement of God's Spirit has touched people's lives and our own in surprising ways? The mystery of God's goodness continues to unfold.

In the Gospel accounts, a rich young man asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him to obey the commandments. After the man says that he has already accomplished this in his life, Jesus tells him that he must do one more task, which is to sell his possessions, give to the poor and follow Jesus. It is not clear that the rich young man did not eventually respond in some way – but we are told that he was sad. It is clear that he did not respond immediately. If he had eventually responded instead of choosing not to follow Jesus, then Jesus might have told him that yet more was going to be asked of him. Discipleship is like that. Jesus calls us to move forward, to go beyond our ordinary existence, to meet the challenge of the frontier.

Jesus himself did not stop short of death itself, even death on the cross. Our discipleship, if we are faithful, is always approaching, but never quite reaching, its goal, until Christ himself brings us the fullness of life – whether this occurs at the conclusion of our lives or at the end of the world. As we reflect upon the past and the call of discipleship in the Church, I would like to suggest that we are facing a new frontier.

As you can see, I think in so many ways, in the modern complexity of Church and society, in the evidence of history, there have been few moments when the Church has not faced a new frontier. This is so not only because of the challenges that come hurtling at us from our ever-shifting environment, but more importantly, because there is no point at which we can say that our discipleship of Jesus has been fully achieved. In following him, we are always facing the unveiling of the mystery of things greater than we could ever imagine. The question is whether we who have striven to keep the commandments will accept the challenges of discipleship. With the rich young man of the Gospel, we can sadly walk away because we are not willing to accept the invitation. We need to continue to look back to see if today we can do something we were unwilling to do yesterday.

Faithful discipleship always moves us slightly to the cutting edge of life – to the frontier. Given the complexity of our world and the complexity of our Church, we can never allow ourselves to be complacent or remain in a maintenance mode. For example, the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops has been taking a serious look at the structure of the Conference, to see how that structure can assist the bishops and dioceses. That means facing the reality of finite, limited resources. Such an assessment is a sobering experience. Just like any family, just like any parish, we see increasing needs and ministerial demands. Yes, we are called to be disciples. That also means that we are called to be good stewards of our resources, good stewards of God's gifts. So while we assess how much we can do, we cannot allow ourselves to give in to unreasonable fear, to shrink from doing what is right. The same principle applies from the parish community, to the diocese, to the nation's conference of bishops, and all in relationship with the Church Universal.

The Second Vatican Council's Constitution of the Church in the Modern World tells us very directly that the joy and the hope, the grief and the anguish of the people of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. And so we respond with organizations such as our diocesan Catholic Charities offices, Catholic Charities USA, and the St. Vincent de Paul Society. On the international scene, we have Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. bishops' overseas development and emergency relief agency, that serves in almost 100 countries. Catholic organizations such as Caritas Internationalis and Cor Unum also minister globally.

These Catholic agencies do very real work in the very real world. The tsunami devastates Southeast Asia, and we are there with our generosity and prayers. We strive as a Church here in the U.S. to be of assistance to other churches wherever they may be, whether in Latin America, the Holy Land, or Africa, to name a few.

As another example, last January, I was one of several bishops who traveled together to the Holy Land, where we met with the bishops of that region. I was there on behalf of the USCCB. Other bishops represented Canada and several European countries. On my first Sunday there I visited Holy Family Parish in Ramallah where Palestinian Catholics worshipped. The pastor and the parishioners were most gracious and hospitable, even though their situation, frankly, was desperate. Their lives drive us to ask hard questions: How can we be of assistance to them? Yes, we can pray for peace in that land, and we can meet with leadership representing both sides of the political fence. But perhaps the harsh realities of everyday life confront us and challenge us even more directly. They live with the reality of walls thirty feet high. Those walls are supposed to isolate and protect. But the fact is, those walls create barriers that exacerbate tremendous frustration with an already difficult, almost impossible, situation.

Yes, I saw adversity. But in their generosity of spirit, I also saw hope. They described an Internet cartoon that depicted the Three Wise Men trying to enter Bethlehem. The Magi encounter the 30-foot barrier walls. So they jump off their camels and start digging a tunnel underneath, so they can come to the place of Jesus' birth.

We just passed the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, which utterly devastated two of our dioceses, Biloxi and New Orleans. Their ability to function as local churches has largely been eradicated. Several other dioceses were severely damaged by the storm. In that same situation, we saw our government fail too many of our fellow citizens, especially the poor and minorities. Despite the devastation, the sense of loss, we can also see great signs for great hope. The response of the national Church has been overwhelmingly generous. I never doubted that for a moment. And I have no doubt but that the generosity will continue. Together, we face a new frontier created by the aftermath of the storm. That's our discipleship, our mission of loving neighbor.

If the Church is to be faithful to her Lord, she must stand ready to accept from him the challenge that "one more thing is needed" for His Gospel to be proclaimed, for evil to be conquered with good, and for his Kingdom to come. I want to describe a new frontier I believe the Lord is opening up to us from a four-fold perspective: spiritual, ecclesial, pastoral, and economic.

First of all, Spiritual. In his book, *A Shattered Lantern*, Father Ron Rolheiser, an Oblate priest, tells us we are called to be contemplatives. With our experience of Church, with our history, with the challenges that we face, each moment turns into an opportunity for grace. St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans reminds us, "Everything is grace." Sometimes it takes the tragedy, the crisis, the loss, or a close brush with death to remind us of what is really truly valuable and precious in our lives. For us in our Roman Catholic tradition, the celebration of Eucharist is a wonderful sacramental encounter with Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer. When we look through the lens of faith, our personal experience, our experience as Church, and the reality in which we live in our world always bring us to a profound appreciation of God's goodness to us and the profound gift of His presence always in our hearts and in our midst.

The Second Vatican Council calls the Eucharist the summit and source of our spiritual lives. The Council also helps us to appreciate how we encounter Jesus in this sacrament that calls us to gather again and again to experience a sign of God's unbounded love. We listen to the Word proclaimed in every Eucharist. St. Paul in his Letter to the Hebrews tells us: "Indeed God's word is sharper than any two edged sword. It penetrates and divides soul and spirit ... it judges the reflections and thoughts of the heart." Psalm 119 tells us that "a lamp to my feet is your word, a light to my path."

Two weeks ago while I was celebrating Mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes in Spokane, a mother came up to me after Mass and told me about her two-year-old. It seems that after the deacon's Gospel procession, and during the reading of the Gospel, the boy went out into the aisle with a missalette held over his head, doing his own little Gospel procession while the Word of God was proclaimed. Sometimes it takes a small event such as this one to remind us of how powerfully ritual teaches and forms us.

Last October, I had the wonderful privilege of attending the Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist in Rome. Some 250 bishops from around the world gathered for three weeks in an experience that was rich and powerful. I encountered a spirit of community and a profound appreciation for this sacrament, the challenge of evangelizing to cultures in which we live, and the need for continued formation of parishioners in the theology and spirituality of the Eucharist were shared.

A few years ago before he died, Bishop Ed Conway, the Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Chicago, mentioned to me that people have a hunger for spirituality, but not necessarily for Church, or for community. Perhaps you have noticed more recent media reports about the dramatic fall-off of Mass attendance in some countries in Europe. In some instances, the percentage has dropped to a single digit. This past year, for example, Archbishop Dermuid Martin, the Archbishop of Dublin, indicated that this past summer is the first time in memory no priest was ordained for that Archdiocese. Although the change here is not as great as that of Europe, we also have seen a drop in Mass attendance in the United States.

Pope Benedict XVI has expressed considerable concern about the secularization of the society in Europe, a concern raised by his predecessor, Pope John Paul II. Spiritual writers have alluded to the necessity and the challenge for us in the Church to evangelize ourselves and our secular society. A few spiritual writers have compared secularism to a teenager of today who is immature and headstrong. Our role as family and as Church is to assist that teenager to grow through this stage of life to become a person who indeed is a mystic and looks at life as a profound gift from God that requires a generous response that is rooted in love. It is not an easy transition for our young people, and it is not an easy transition for society, either. But the fact that there is tremendous potential for conversion and a deeper appreciation of God's presence in our lives and our response to that presence, should give all of us a fervent enthusiasm and a prayer to God that the Holy Spirit will help us to be instruments of God's grace.

All of us this keeps us humble. While we await the message of Pope Benedict XVI as a result of the Synod on the Eucharist last October, we are mindful of Pope John Paul's encyclical *Eucharist of the Church* (2003), and his Apostolic Letter "A Day of the Lord" (1998), which referred to the primacy of Sunday as a highlight of our weekly spiritual journey. In the meantime, we must do everything possible within the Church and specifically within our parishes to make the celebration of Sunday Eucharist beautiful, moving, and prayerful.

A few weeks ago, we concluded a series of Sunday Gospel readings in which Jesus teaches us that he is the "Bread of Life." The Eucharist, well celebrated in beautiful and devotional settings within our churches, is a source of tremendous power and energy, fire in the heart. We cannot allow this moment of opportunity to pass us by. This sacrament not only touches us in profound ways, but challenges us as well as to go out into the world as Eucharistic people. The frontier of our spirituality at the present moment also calls us to be a prayerful people, steeped in rich tradition and spiritualities which all contribute to our growth as a holy people. In a world filled with so many images, cultural pressures, and values oftentimes contrary to the Gospel, we cross this frontier with a deep commitment to Church and to evangelizing our world. The example of "salt and light" to which Jesus calls us, invites us to be missionaries. In that context, in a sense all of us are missionaries: husbands and wives, parishioners, youth, parents and yes, of course, sisters, deacons, priests, and bishops.

We bishops have had a humbling experience to be cast on the glare of publicity as men who failed in our responsibility. And even if in conscience we are not sure that these charges are fair, it has reminded us that we are the successors of men who, in their own time, were not respected, and in fact were defiled for preaching the Gospel. Discipleship means that each day, we take up our cross, no matter what form our cross might take. We who are given the position of authority in the community are not to be like the great ones among the Gentiles, lording it over others and making our authority and influence felt. We are to consider ourselves the least of our brothers and sisters and the servants of all. This observation leads me to my next reflection, the “ecclesial frontier.”

The Second Vatican Council recovered the sense of fundamental vocation that all members of the Church receive Baptism. From the time of the Council forward, the Council Fathers developed a call for participative structures which were eventually incorporated in the revised Code of Canon Law in 1983. We all know what a long, hard road we have walked since the Council in trying to design and implement these structures at both the diocesan and parish levels. After attending the World Synod of Bishops last fall, I can say that even within the College of Bishops, implementing participation remains an issue. And perhaps this is a clue as to what we need to focus on locally in implementing the needs and structures of participation. We might have moved too quickly and too exclusively to what these needs are meant to do and what authority they have or do not have. Perhaps they have never sufficiently been imagined as an expression of Church. Their inherent connection to the community at worship has not been sufficiently explored.

Christ is in the midst of our participative structures as He said He would be: “Wherever two or three are gathered in His name...” They involve meetings of disciples who are known as Christ’s disciples by their love for one another. I do not mean to suggest that when real differences arise when business is discussed, that they should be papered over in favor of present pieties. But service in the Church’s participative structures, such as a parish or diocesan pastoral councils, is not a trial run for the City Council.

I am always somewhat surprised when this aspect of serving in the Church as participative structures is taken for granted, almost as if “it is the easy part.” Such councils provide real opportunities for the laity to exercise their membership, their ownership, of their parish and diocesan communities. That is not always easy. After all, which is easier to do? Pass some resolutions even if they are hotly debated, or manifest how we love one another as Christ has loved us? A 6 in favor and 5 against pastoral decision is not pastoral.

We must keep in perspective what has happened during this last half-century in the Church’s mission and life. The Second Vatican Council has called us to be even more genuinely a Church founded by the Lord Jesus. Especially given modern technology and especially the development of theology, the Church has come into remarkable contact with herself and with her mission to the world. It’s not that we’re a perfect structure at the moment, but we do see ourselves interfacing with our Church universal and with the world in a different way than ever before.

Take a look at the legacy of Pope John Paul II and how his charisma and role as a Holy Father profoundly touched the world community. The role and necessity of a Conference of Bishops in our own particular country has grown significantly. The role of the Conference has developed and increased in terms of assistance to our local Churches and in terms of our relationship with the Holy See and the Church Universal: The bishops of the Western Hemisphere gather once a year for a three-day meeting to discuss common issues and challenges. Last year we met in Bogotá; this year, we will meet in Ottawa, and next spring in Brazil for the large meeting of CELAM.

Here at home, Catholic organizations have been growing at a tremendous rate these days. Two particular examples are the Knights of Columbus and Serra Club International. Just a few weeks ago I was in Orlando, Florida for the Knights Annual Supreme Convention, with delegates of various Knights councils from all over the United States, Canada, the Philippines, Mexico, and a few South American countries. Councils in Poland have just become new members. In late June, Spokane was blessed by hosting Serra International's annual gathering. Serra brings together men and women from many different countries to work together to promote vocations to the priesthood and the religious life, and to promote the spiritual growth of its individual members. The gathering was particularly noteworthy for us, since Spokane is the site of the second Serra Club ever established – right behind the first, in Seattle.

Personally, I have found that the participative structures of the Church have been absolutely essential as we address the sexual abuse crisis. We are making significant decisions that will have an effect on the Church now and for eternity. The bishops' National Review Board consists mostly of laity. That structure was organized to help us bishops as we try to address this problem. That committee continues its work in cooperation with the Bishop's Committee on the Protection of Children and Youth.

All of this sets in motion a more participative Church. Laity and priests and Religious, disciples one and all, engaged in a common mission: proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As we address our needs of Church, continuing focus must be made on strengthening our communities of faith, our liturgical celebrations, and our outreach to God's poor and needy. Our Catholic school system, Catholic Charities organizations, and our advocacy for the poor and vulnerable are just some of the signs in our contemporary world that speak loudly of our commitment to the Gospel and our support for the common good.

The third area of a "New Frontier" is pastoral. Pastorally, I believe the challenge of this New Frontier has two aspects: making worship more deeply prayerful, and recommitting ourselves to the service of those in need.

Nothing is more fundamental to parish life than Eucharistic worship. As we share in the work of God, it is easy for this work to be totally task-oriented, repetitive, without spirit or zeal, or as we sometimes say: "we can easily allow ourselves to slip into the maintenance mode."

Our Sunday worship must be seen and lived as the center of our week – our most unique contact with Jesus and His saving work, the source that nourishes and drives our communal and personal spiritual lives. I am not referring here primarily to performance issues: better reading, better homilies, better music. No doubt, these are important. If the Church were a theater, we could concern ourselves only with effective how people experience symbols on an emotional level. We are more than theater, however. As Church, we are a house of prayer. Our standard cannot be applause. Our standard must be, Does this help us pray? A well prepared but narcissistic liturgy, one that concentrates on its own beauty rather than on raising minds and hearts to God, is no great advance over a sloppy one. Imagine if Sunday worship were the kind of prayerful experience I'm talking about. Imagine the powerful force we would unleash upon the world! How much more demanding of us would be a community on fire with Eucharistic love! But also, how much more inspiring than a congregation of mediocre believers. Priests and parishioners must be mutually inspiring forces. Our liturgy is God's gift to us, and our gift to one another.

We must renew our parishes as communities of reconciliation. In his 2nd Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul describes us as being ambassadors of reconciliation; Christ, as it were, appealing through us. Indeed, that is true. Perhaps in the past we have looked at the sacrament of Reconciliation more as a vertical experience – the restoration of the right relationship between God and each individual person. Certainly that remains an indispensable part of the ministry of Reconciliation. But the Church's recent crisis has focused us on the need for communal Reconciliation as well.

This spirit of reconciliation infusing our parishes and dioceses will help them, purified and humbled, to be more genuine witnesses to the power of God and Christ seeking to reconcile all people to one another and to him.

On the pastoral level, one of our prime areas of concern is effective support for marriage and family life. Every Sunday we celebrate Eucharist with a parish community that consists largely of married couples and their children. I don't have to tell you, though, that marriage is in trouble in our society. Not only is the divorce rate relatively high, with all of its negative effects, but fewer people are choosing to marry in the first place. Co-habitation, same-sex unions, serial polygamy, significant spousal abuse, and a contraceptive mentality have challenged the very meaning of marriage as we have always understood it and taught it.

We need to find ways in which our parishes and dioceses can support those already married, assist couples in preparing to live life-long marriage, and challenge those who have given up on the idea of marriage. Perhaps too little have we focused on the importance of the challenge of living a married life together, especially when married relationships now are much more extended than they were 50 or 100 years ago. Our times emphasize instant gratification as a value. We need to appreciate more than ever that true love is not without sacrifice, the kind of sacrifice that is readily observable in the person of Jesus on the cross.

Besides a need for a spirit of prayer that should pervade our liturgy, our parishes and dioceses are being called to recommit themselves to being centers of mercy and justice. Our sense of Church centers on concern for those in need. Just consider our Church's tremendously generous response to those who continue to suffer the impact of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita. I am amazed at the stories of people who not only responded to the need, but responded in person – individuals who drove from the Northwest with a truckload of goods to assist people recovering from these tragic storms.

Our sense of mercy and justice cannot be reserved only for times of extraordinary disaster. Our parishes and dioceses need to be active in responding to those who are marginalized in our society, especially those who seem to be permanently alienated, shuffled off to the side, forgotten. Currently, we are focusing on initiatives in the Church relating to justice for immigrants and abolition of the death penalty. In many ways, I believe we are on the verge of an era in which one of our most effective witnesses will be the concern we show, creating a society of mercy and justice that begins with our own communities. I am very proud of the Church's social teaching. That voice is absolutely unique in today's world. More and more, our planet becomes a truly global village. Our teaching is even more essential as we begin to take responsibility for one another.

The fourth frontier in our Church today is economic. Probably five years ago we would never have thought that this would be a new frontier for the Church. But clearly it has become one.

We find ourselves in the most prosperous nation in the world. In a broad sense, the Church in the United States is not lacking in material resources. But remember about 90 out of 195 dioceses in the United States receive grants from the Catholic Home Missions Appeal to supplement their incomes. My diocese is one of them. It's encouraging to see an increased effort to imbue our Catholic communities of faith with a spirit of stewardship that emphasizes the spiritual, rather than only paying attention to needed outcomes.

Focusing upon particular goals can be somewhat problematic, especially when the goals for user resources can change over the years. A spirit of stewardship that is profoundly spiritual, that reflects a generosity in the spirit of the Gospel, can be life-long and life-changing.

The last few years has seen the Church face the tremendous financial cost of the sexual abuse crisis. So much of the litigation is focused on the Church as an economic entity, an organization that appears to have "deep pockets," some sort of bottomless wallet. This is nothing new. For years, there has been speculation on the cost of the crises to the Church.

On the one hand, this speculation is a bit unreal. People look at our magnificent structures dedicated as houses of worship. They see our many institutions. They look to the Vatican, with the priceless works of art, the images that can lead us to the Divine.

Yes, the sexual abuse crisis has already been costly to the Church. Clergy misconduct has cost us dearly in terms of financial resources. The emotional toll has been equally devastating. Even though we assure parishioners that by an overwhelming amount the contribution which they put in the collection basket remains in the parish to support parish operations, a degree of skepticism has been expressed by some of the Catholic people about the Bishop's stewardship. In the end, it is a pretense not to think that the contributions of faithful in some form or other have been and will have to be used to bring an end to diocesan litigation. All the funds of the Church belong to the community of faith. It is foolhardy to separate one pocket from the other.

Canon Law now mandates Finance Councils for both dioceses and parishes. This is a matter in which consultation with the laity, a participative structure, is not only prudent but required. In the complexity of the world in which we live today, there is no pastor or any bishop who can make consistently good and prudent decisions in this regard without the assistance of the gifts of the laity.

Every bishop feels his responsibility to be a good steward. In most cases, today's bishops did not create the patrimony of the diocesan Church. Those resources are the result of the sacrifice and generosity of the people of God through long history. But it is also important to remember that the true patrimony of the Church is, first of all, not material goods, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a Gospel which He preached to the poor. Remember our Gospel story of the rich young man. In days past, and even today, there are many people of wealth and power who would not, who cannot heed Christ's call, because it would cost them their possessions.

St. Paul wrote no more powerful words than these, from his First Letter to the Corinthians: "Since in God's wisdom the world did not come to know him though 'wisdom,' it pleased God to save those who believe through the absurdity of preaching the Gospel. Yes, Jews demand 'signs' and the Greeks look for 'wisdom,' but we preach Christ crucified — a stumbling block to the Jews, and an absurdity to the Gentiles; but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's folly is wiser than men, and his weakness more powerful than men."

The wisdom of which St. Paul speaks can be applied to money and material possessions. There is a great difference between doing God's will, and between relying on what conventionally brings power and influence in this world. Christ crucified may have been a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but in truth He is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

As a Church, we are called to a poverty of spirit which manifests itself in our identification with the poor, the vulnerable, and with all those in need. We stand ready to help because it is in service to them that we find the wisdom and power of God. That poverty of spirit also requires that we not simply accept "the great ones" of the world as they are, but that we call them to similar identification with those in need. Through that they will come to know that "the weakness of God is stronger than human strength."

In the Church, the poor should find a home which they sense is truly theirs. There, the rich should discover God's will for the use of gifts which he has given them. Certainly as you gather in support of the Catholic Foundation here this afternoon, you have an opportunity for that discovery and response.

These are some of the Frontiers of the Church we experience today. We have been so richly blessed by God, especially in this part of the world. Yes, we are a New Frontier in the Church, one of many along the way in our history.

As we come to this present moment and look beyond, we do so with full awareness that when we next hear the Lord say, "One more thing is needed," it may very well be something we never thought. We prayerfully hope that we will listen to the voice of the Lord, and that we will readily accept his words in peace and joy.

Thank you for inviting me to be with you. Please pray for me, and for all Church leaders – priests, Religious, bishops, and the laity. May God's blessings and peace be with all of you!