

Mass of Installation as the Seventh Bishop of Spokane
Homily of the Most Reverend Thomas A. Daly
Wednesday, May 20, 2015

It has been said by some scripture commentaries that the Acts of the Apostles often presents an idealistic picture of the early church. That is, when Luke narrates the events of the first Christians, the positive aspects of the early community of believers are highlighted, while the less edifying ones are glossed over.

In our first reading from Acts, we hear of St. Paul addressing the presbyters, the priests of Ephesus, a community Paul greatly loved. Scholars tell us that Paul labored there for nearly three years. Here, he tells the early church that the gifts Christ gives its members lead to growth and renewal. Ethical admonition is not lacking either, all aspects of human life and relationships are illumined by the light of Christ.

With this as a background, our first reading gives us a glimpse of how much the community respected Paul. He had just urged them to “keep watch over yourselves and the over the whole flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you overseers.” The passage we heard is serious in its tone, with warnings to be careful, to be vigilant, especially that once he leaves, “savage wolves will come among you, from your own group, the truth will be distorted.” There is a reminder to help the weak and keep in mind the words of Jesus, found only here that, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” When he finished speaking, we are told that the presbyters knelt with Paul in prayer, all were weeping loudly as they threw their arms around him, for they were deeply distressed that he had said that they would never see his face again. Then they escorted him to the ship. St. Paul’s devotion to his people has always been a model for priests and bishops alike, a true shepherd and pastor after Christ’s own heart.

Since July of 2014, in addition to being auxiliary bishop in the Diocese of San Jose, I have served as the pastor of St. Nicholas and St. William parishes in Los Altos, in the northwestern part of Santa Clara County. Pastoring of more than two parishes is common here in Spokane and other dioceses, but not necessarily in San Jose. Assisting me at St. Nicholas and St. William has been Fr. John Poncini, Parochial Vicar (and as of five minutes ago, the pastor). The staff included a pastoral year seminarian, Khoa Vu, a dedicated school principal and secretaries, faith formation and youth minister. Fr. Poncini had been vocation director prior to becoming my associate pastor; we knew each other well when I held the position of vocation director in the Archdiocese of San Francisco and have worked closely since I came to the Diocese of San Jose.

In February, I received a call from my assistant Clarissa. She said that the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Viganò, was trying to reach me.

I called back and he said that Pope Francis had appointed me the bishop of Diocese of Spokane. After discussions, a date was set as to when the public announcement would be made. Bishop McGrath asked me to inform the staff shortly before the public announcement.

I have enjoyed serving as pastor. The people have been great through what we called an “alignment” of St. Nicholas and St. William. A few staff changes occurred, but it has been a blessing. We worked well together, something I thought similar to Paul with the presbyters of Ephesus.

A few days before I told the staff of St. Nicholas and St. William about the announcement, I told Fr. John and Khoa. Kneeling in prayer, weeping loudly, arms thrown around me because they were so distressed that they would never see me again...Paul experienced all of that, but I surely did not. When I told them that I had been named the Bishop of Spokane, the seminarian got up and left the room without saying a word. I thought, “He must be upset.”

Without any hesitation or emotion, Fr. John said, “How soon can you get out of the Rectory?”

A few minutes later, the seminarian, whose positive evaluation of his pastoral year was already in the hands of St. Patrick Seminary, entered the room carrying my official portrait in his hands. He said, “You should take this. We won’t be needed this here any more.” Oh, there was one similarity to Paul’s departure: at least they escorted me to the airport.

You recall that 2008-2009 was the year of St Paul. In September 2008, Pope Emeritus Benedict in his address to the new bishops of the world gathered in Rome, quoted St. Gregory the Great, who described Paul as the greatest pastor of all. Pope Benedict went on to say, “As bishops, we must learn from the Apostle’s great love for Jesus Christ. From the moment of his encounter with the divine Teacher on the road to Damascus, St. Paul’s whole life was a process of inner and apostolic conformation to Christ amidst persecution and suffering.”

“I have been crucified with Christ...and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

The community of Ephesus saw in Paul a true shepherd, a pastor. He was a man of faith, of hard work, of compassion, of truth, of humility and of courage: qualities still needed if a priest or a bishop is give witness to the words, “Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching...always be steady.” These were St. Paul’s words to Timothy on the eve of his death.

In our Gospel, Jesus is also on the eve of His death. He too prays for those “the Father has given Him,” asking God to keep them from the Evil One, consecrating them in the truth, sending them into the world.” Jesus’ prayer is that they may share “my joy completely.”

At the heart of what has been called His priestly prayer, Jesus intercedes for His disciples that they may be faithful and that they may always be united. He is concerned about their fidelity... “It will not be easy...I guarded them and none of them was lost except the one.” They were united by one faith and for them to maintain that unity, they must be willing to put aside their own interests. Jesus specifically asks the Father to “consecrate them in truth.” (To consecrate means to be set apart for God.) By virtue of baptism, they and we, are set apart for God, but they were not separated from the world. They remain in the world but do not belong to the world. Jesus is not asking that the Church be removed from the world, because the problem is not the Church in the world, but the world in the Church... that insidious temptation to fit into an ever changing secular society to look for short cuts, to comprise fundamental teachings on the sacredness of life, the sanctity of marriage, the dignity of the poor, the truth that God “so loved the world that He gave us His only Son, our Savior.”

Pope Francis has often spoken of a “culture of encounter”. He has used this term in many different contexts but at its heart is the essential role of the Church to be engaged in the world, not to withdrawing from the many struggles and burdens people carry. The culture of encounter is the Christian response to what Pope Francis has termed the “throwaway culture”, whereby any human being, especially the poor, vulnerable, children, who does not benefit society in some immediate or pragmatic way is removed from sight, presumably to become someone else’s problem to be solved. A Church that retreats from these challenges bears no resemblance to the Church that has been consecrated in truth and sent by Jesus Himself into the world.

Last night, on the shelf in the library at Bishop White Seminary, I found a copy of [A History of the Catholic Church in the Pacific Northwest: 1743-1983](#) by Wilfred Schoenberg, a Jesuit professor from Gonzaga. The book is almost 900 pages and I quickly read as much about the Diocese of Spokane as I could. There are stories of priests and bishops and the faithful, sometimes at war with those outside the church. At other times, there were battles within. Most years, there was a combination of vocation wars, and battles about finances. I read about bishops looking regal and stately at their “enthronement” and by the end, looking small and feeble under the heavy vestments, clutching the crozier fiercely, facing the people saying, “It was a wicked world,” in a squeaky nasal voice.

“What we need is prayer and penance,” Bishop White shouted his message several times, “Prayer and Penance Prayer and penance.” A powerful message, the author writes, Bishop White’s last legacy to his church, a powerful message that was remembered long after everything else was forgotten.

Here in this cathedral named in honor of Our Lady of Lourdes, the only cathedral in the country, maybe the world, to bear this honor, we recall those words of Our Blessed Mother to Bernadette in the south of France in 1858: "Penance, penance, penance, pray for sinners." These words were spoken almost 100 years before Bishop White uttered them at the end of the Marian Mass in December 5, 1954. Penance means conversion, a turning back to God, and in so doing, we become consecrated in Christ truth, His love, His mercy.

The Church in the United States has experienced tremendous challenges these last 10 to 15 years, and the prayers of Jesus and St. Paul for strength, fidelity, protection and joy are as needed for all of us today, as they were for the apostles and the early Church.

The complex problems facing every diocese can be overwhelming, only if we think we can or must deal with the issues on our own. Humility, trust, and surrender all qualities of the Mother of our Lord and so many saints before us will lead to hope, healing and joy.

In St. Luke's Gospel we are told that, "Mary pondered all these things in her heart." To ponder and to reflect in silence, to listen to the Lord has, sadly, become a luxury for most people.

Over the last 9 years, I have been blessed to lead small vocation pilgrimages to Lourdes and the Rue du Bac through the generosity of Mrs. Barbara McCullough, a woman of faith concerned with the next generation of Religious and priests. In the midst of these places of profound prayer and healing, one is always struck by the blessed opportunities for silence, at the Grotto and in the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal.

Coming from the Silicon Valley, an area known for the birthplace of modern technology, we are confronted by too much noise and information overload. Most of this noise is self-generated and unnecessary: cell phones, Instagram and e-mails bombard people every day, where the boundaries between work and home are further blurred. We need time to be quiet with the Lord, where He speaks loudest in the quiet of our hearts. Eucharistic adoration is increasingly popular with our young people. Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament becomes a place of rest and strength, a mini-retreat to listen to where the Lord is calling us to serve, to discover one's vocation.

As I become the 7th Bishop of this diocese, let us together ask for Mary's intercession to lead us ever closer to Her Son, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us.

St. Vincent de Paul, pray for us.

Live Jesus in our hearts, Forever.