

3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time “Partners in the Gospel”

Bishop Frank Schuster

My friends, last Wednesday, the Archbishop hosted a convocation in Tacoma which turned into one of the largest assemblies of lay ecclesial ministers, parish leadership, priests, and deacons in the history of the Archdiocese. The focus of the day was about a new initiative in our Archdiocese to address declining Sunday Mass attendance, and the reality of fewer vocations to priesthood and lay ecclesial ministry. This new initiative is called “Partners in the Gospel”. With decreased revenue and shifting demographics in the Pacific Northwest, we simply need to re-envision what ministry should look like the Archdiocese of Seattle so we can get back to the mission Jesus gave us to make disciples of all nations. As part of that vision, churches in the coming years will be partnered with each other throughout Western Washington and be asked to work together as parish families.

You may be wondering, what will all this look like for Saint Vincent de Paul? The short answer is, I don’t know. You would think the auxiliary bishop would know how this will all play out, but I simply don’t, nor does Archbishop Etienne because this is a process. I do know that we will hear more in the months ahead and that there will be an opportunity for feedback so stay tuned and please keep all this in your prayers. Clearly, we should enter this process sober, understanding that along with some healthy differences of opinion, people will be tempted along the way to succumb to division. That is what the devil does, sow division. I imagine there will be temptation along the way for members from one parish to resist being partnered with members of another parish if they are placed together into a new family. If you see this start happening when the family models appear at some point down the road, my prayer is that we all remember St. Paul. “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

My friends, we are one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Would that everywhere, Catholics could link arms as partners in the Gospel! Imagine that. It could change the face of the earth! Again, throughout this process we need to always remember the mission Jesus gave his apostles, to make disciples of all nations. This is something we are struggling to do right now in the Archdiocese of Seattle. So, join me in praying for Partner’s in the Gospel’s success and that we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus every step of the way. A video from Archbishop Etienne will be sent out Sunday evening via parish Newsletter explaining all this, so please take time to watch it to learn more.

If any of this is making you nervous, it means you are listening, and so “thank you”. However, please consider that times like these are nothing new in the history of our faith. It is on full display in the readings we have for this weekend. To begin with our first reading from the prophet Isaiah, the highest moments for the Jews of the Old Testament were the Kingdoms of David and Solomon. Unfortunately, divisions became so great in the Kingdom after Solomon that the Kingdom physically split into two nations. The north remained Israel and the South became Judah. Things got so bad that

Judah formed an alliance with the Gentiles of Assyria to form an invasion army that wreaked havoc in Israel. It is this context that Isaiah prophesies a light in the darkness, a new King David and new Christos who would unite the people and cleanse them from all from their sins. How about that? The pastoral plan was the Son of God himself and a new vision for Israel.

In the chapters following our second reading, Paul's answer to the dysfunction in Corinth was the Eucharist, as we see in chapter 11. What does being a Eucharistic people look like? Flip to chapter 12, one body of Christ, many parts, one body. What does one body of Christ look like? Chapter 13, a people who, at the end of the day, are a people who embrace faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love. Saint Paul is writing this because he is not seeing enough love in the hearts of the people in Corinth. Their pastoral plan did not have enough faith, hope, and love.

Meanwhile, in our Gospel reading, Jesus is fulfilling what the prophet Isaiah said about him in the first reading, Jesus is preaching the Kingdom in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. By including the Galilee of the Gentiles, he is telling them that, as messiah, he is the light to all nations not just Israel. He is bringing together in his person one kingdom united in faith for the salvation of the world. That's the plan.

To get there, what does the Light of the World and the Light of Life require of us? Jesus says, "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand." As many of you recall, the word for repent in English is impoverished. The Greek is *metanoia*. *Meta* means transcend. *Nous* means mind. When Jesus says repent, he means everything you know is wrong, transcend your current way of seeing things, and lose the myopia of egotism so to gain a new vision of the world in light of the Kingdom of God. By the waters of baptism, we are citizens of one Kingdom of God, one body of Christ, and a communion of saints.

My friends, as the Archdiocese moves forward in faith with Partners in the Gospel, pray with me that we all embrace the fullest meaning of the word *metanoia*, of transcending our current way of thinking, and turn away from sin every step of the way. The only pastoral plan that is going to work for us and for our Archdiocese is one that always stays focused on Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life.