

**Homily for a Parish Visit to
Saint Isidore Parish, Bethany**

**22nd Sunday of the Year - Cycle C
September 1, 2013**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

As Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, it is a privilege for me to celebrate and preach at this Mass with you today. Usually when a bishop comes to a parish, it is a special occasion, like administering the Sacrament of Confirmation or celebrating a parish jubilee. I am not here for any of those reasons today. I am here for a regular Sunday Mass because I want at some time to visit every parish in our diocese, in order to get to know the people and the places that make up our Catholic community in central Illinois.

What does a bishop look for when he comes to a parish? Well, I didn't come to see if the floors were cleaned and the pews were polished! Though I must say, your church looks very nice! I take my cue from the Gospel passage where Jesus asks, "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

First and foremost, when a bishop comes to a parish, he looks for the presence of the Catholic **faith**, to see whether it is strong and vibrant, whether it is growing, and if the conditions are present for its continued growth in the future. So it is good to see people of faith gathered here.

At the same time, a pastoral visit is not just a time for a bishop to see the parish, but also for the parish to see the bishop. The Church is all about relationships. As the three persons of the Trinity are an intimate communion of Father, Son and Spirit in relationship to each other, the Church exists as a communion in relationship to God and in relation to each other, the People of God, the Body of Christ. As a bishop, I have a special relationship with you, and you have a special relationship with me, and one of my roles is to bridge the relationship between you and the Pope and the rest of the universal Church, so that we may all be one in Christ's Body, into which we have been incorporated by the grace of Baptism.

In our Gospel passage today, when Jesus goes to dine at the house of the Pharisee, he notices how all the other guests have made sure of their own positions. The atmosphere of the evening is not relaxed. Everyone there is scrutinizing this young preacher. What will he do? What will he say? How will he behave? Jesus decides not to disappoint them. He tells

them a story about going to a wedding. Jesus seems to like wedding stories. They are great images of the world, of life and of God's inviting us to take a proper part in the life of God's own kingdom.

Jesus says that it is good to conduct ourselves in this world with humility and not to go marching up to the front as if it is our due. That is the gist of Jesus' story. We are all invited to this wedding, not just some of us. We all have a seat at the table. Demanding or expecting special treatment is no way to behave. Jesus then goes on to tell a second story, about poor people and underprivileged people, and of how they never get invitations to a wedding, never get invited to share in life's bounty.

During that evening's dinner party, Jesus has seen clearly how we go wrong. First, we like to put people in an order of importance and to make sure that the privileges we have garnered for ourselves do not get squandered on others. And second, there are some people whom we consider do not deserve to be at the party of life at all. Look, the Lord is saying to us, you have all this wealth and all this food, and you forget about those who are penniless and starving. Jesus does not despise our parties, those gatherings of family and friends, which are the real joy of our

lives. They are lovely and important occasions. Jesus is telling us, in our good fortune, to remember those who are hungry and poor.

Along these lines, there is a story from tenth-century Ireland, when there were as many as 150 kings, local chieftains, who ruled their own small territories. Brian Boru was to become the last great High King of Ireland, but in his early days, while he was still a local chieftain, there is a story told of him that showed his self-confidence and respect for others.

On one of his journeys, Brian came to visit another local king. When it was time to dine, one of Brian's entourage came up to him in great agitation. Brian asked the man what was the matter. "My Lord," said his servant, "these people have insulted you. They have given you a lesser place at their table, when they should have seated you at the head." Brian smiled and, turning to his servant, said, "Do not distress yourself. Wherever Brian Boru sits *is* the head of the table!"

In this little incident we see a man who is quietly confident of his own place in the world, a man who does not need the adulation or deference of others to know his own worth. His dignity resides in himself. He does not need others to constantly tell him how wonderful he is. Social

status comes from our inner virtue, not from outward marks of worldly glory.

We are now entering the last few months of the “Year of Faith” proclaimed by Pope Benedict XVI. At the heart of this Year of Faith is the personal encounter with the triune God. Indeed, in his apostolic letter announcing this year, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of “the need to rediscover the journey of faith so as to shed clearly light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ” (*Porta Fidei*, 2).

Unfortunately, not everyone shares in our joy and enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ. You may have heard the statistic that the second-largest religious group in the United States is non-practicing Catholics. I am sure that many of us know personally the people and stories behind these numbers. They are our sisters and brothers, our nieces and nephews, our sons and daughters, our neighbors and co-workers.

What can we say to reignite in them the fire of faith, to call them back to the promises made and received in Baptism? What is Christ inspiring us to do to proclaim the faith anew to these lost sheep? These questions lie at the heart of the Year of Faith. Of this task, Benedict XVI wrote: “To rediscover the content of the faith that is professed, celebrated, lived, and

prayed, and to reflect on the act of faith, is a task that every believer must make his own, especially in the course of this Year” (*Porta Fidei*, 9). To this end, I would like to propose to a three-fold plan to make the most of this Year of Faith.

First, we must be grateful for the faith we have received, for our encounter with the Lord. Families should strive to make their homes places where the family prays together, reads the Scriptures together, and is nourished together at Sunday Mass. Families should strive to allow their faith to influence everything they do, rather than reserving their faith only for an hour or so on Sunday.

Second, we must endeavor to understand all the more clearly the faith we profess. If a friend, family member or co-worker asks us a question about Catholicism, can we provide an adequate – and correct – answer? We ought to be able to do so.

Third, we must share our faith, not only with our family and friends, but with our co-workers and everyone we meet. As the Pope Emeritus reminded us, “Confessing with the lips indicates in turn that faith implies public testimony and commitment” (*Porta Fidei*, 10). Through this

testimony and commitment, we invite others into a relationship with the God who is both three and one.

This three-fold plan is the way of discipleship and through it we learn to follow Jesus Christ, to live ever more fully the grace of Baptism.

As we approach Christ in holy communion at this and at every Mass, may our gathering around this altar and our celebration of the Eucharist always fill us with an awareness of the grace and peace that comes to us from God our Father through the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

May God give us this grace. Amen.