

**Homily for the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Anthony Hospital Chapel  
St. Anthony Memorial Hospital, Effingham**

**October 19, 2015**

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Reverend Fathers, consecrated religious, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here to celebrate this Mass to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the dedication of this chapel at St. Anthony Memorial Hospital. We offer our thanks to God in our celebration of the Eucharist for the many ways in which the chapel has served as the heart of this hospital. It is from this heart that the merciful love of Jesus has gone forth and touched the lives of so many people who have come here in times of sickness and need.

As this hospital is sponsored by the Hospital Sisters of Saint Francis, it is appropriate that we recall a story about Saint Francis. Saint Francis of Assisi is said to have instructed his brothers, "Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary, use words!" That is wise advice, but one of the pitfalls of this saying is that it can be used as an excuse for not talking about one's faith, thinking that the Gospel is being sufficiently preached by one's good example. The problem with this is that often words are indeed necessary.

We can do all kinds of good things for a variety of reasons, but if we want people to know that our good deeds are motivated by our Catholic faith, we have to say so expressly! Using words along with our good deeds is essential to the missionary activity of the Church. Missionaries have traditionally built relationships with people by establishing schools, caring for the sick and feeding the hungry. But if they wanted people to join the Catholic Church, missionaries needed to tell them about their Catholic faith that motivated their good works, following the example of the love of Jesus Christ in caring for those in need (see *Matthew* 25:40). Otherwise, the motivation behind their good deeds would not have been recognized as being related to putting their faith into action. On the other hand, if we only talk about faith but don't put it into practice through our good works, our faith is empty. As we read in the letter of Saint James, "Faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (*James* 2:17).

In our Gospel for today's Mass, we hear the familiar account of Jesus' last words to His Apostles before ascending to His Father in Heaven. This passage from Matthew's Gospel, known as the Great Commission, serves as the marching orders for the Church from her first days all the way until when Christ returns at the end of time. The Church is always to see her

activities, however diverse they may be, as a participation in this mission entrusted to her nearly two-thousand years ago. This topic of mission is one that has been a recurring theme in the pontificate of our Holy Father, Pope Francis. He continues to stress the necessity for the Church to live her missionary character with greater intensity. He warns of the dangers of being too turned in on ourselves while there are so many who are in need of hearing the Good News of the Gospel.

When we hear the word “missionary,” we may tend to think about those who go to a distant land to proclaim the Gospel to a people for the first time. We think of examples like the saints that we celebrate today, known as the North American Martyrs. They left their native lands in Europe to bring the message of salvation to the various Native American tribes of the Northeast. They dedicated all that they had to this mission, even to the point of shedding their blood in the supreme form of witness. That witness, far from being a defeat, was the ultimate sign of victory, a victory which would yield abundant fruit in the lives of those to whom they served in that mission.

While we rightfully look to examples such as these as models of missionary work, the mission of which the Holy Father is speaking is much broader. There will always be a need for missionaries to go off to distant lands to spread the faith. But there is also just as urgent of a need for missionaries to be active right here. Even those who have heard the Good News are in constant need of being reminded of that message so that it does not grow cold, but will continue to spur them on in their various circumstances.

In his homily for the Canonization of St. Junipero Serra in Washington, D.C. last month, the Holy Father touched on this broad notion of the mission that the Church has received. He said the following:

Jesus did not provide a short list of who is, or is not, worthy of receiving his message and his presence. Instead, he always embraced life as he saw it. In faces of pain, hunger, sickness and sin. In faces of wounds, of thirst, of weariness, doubt and pity.<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Father is inviting us to see that the subjects to whom the Church's mission is directed are all around us – in our families, in our places of work, in our parishes, in our communities. In other words, the

mission of Christ is to be carried out everywhere, and all of us called to take part in that mission.

Pope Francis tells us that “anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love.”<sup>2</sup> We cannot say that we are too young or inexperienced to be missionaries. All that we need to begin is that experience of God’s love, which is made available to us every day in so many ways, especially when we come to Mass.

As the Holy Father has demonstrated in his words and by his actions, a special focus of the mission is to those who are suffering. It is no coincidence that so many hospitals have been founded by and continue to be operated by various groups within the Catholic Church. Jesus shows a special concern for those who experience physical suffering, and so the Church has seen her work of serving those who are sick and suffering as one of her most important missionary works. This hospital, then, has a very important role to play in the mission of the Church here in this area of the diocese as so many come here to be relieved of their suffering and cured of their sickness.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this homily, the chapel is the heart of this hospital, for it is here that Christ is present. All of the merciful love that patients experience is closely connected to what happens here when Mass is celebrated and as Christ is present day and night in the tabernacle and exposed in the monstrance. It is therefore not a stretch to try to connect the chapel with the rest of what happens in this hospital. It is all connected.

The presence of this chapel is a reminder that the mission of this hospital must always remain centered on Christ. It is Christ who has called us to this mission. It is Christ whom we serve in those who are in need. It is Christ and His love that we bring to the patients. It is Christ who blesses us with our skills of healing. Christ is at the center of everything that happens here, and it is from His substantial presence here in this chapel that He continues to sustain every aspect of the mission that takes place in this hospital.

As we continue of celebration of the Eucharist, let us ask the Lord to open our hearts to be His missionaries in the many circumstances that surround our lives. In a particular way, let us see this hospital as a privileged place in which to exercise that mission with generosity and love.

May we always keep Christ at the center of this mission and continue to be renewed in our efforts by seeking the strength and love that He offers to us from His abiding presence here in this chapel.

May God give us the grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Mass of Canonization for St. Junipero Serra*, 23 September 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §10.