

**Homily for Homily for Pastoral Visit
St. Frances Xavier Cabrini Parish, Springfield, Illinois
Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year C**

September 4, 2016

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This weekend, the eyes of the world once again looked toward the city of Rome as the Holy Father Pope Francis canonized Saint Teresa of Calcutta earlier today. Her enrollment among the triumphant saints of heaven is a cause of great joy and inspiration for us, but it also calls to mind the question we heard just a few moments ago: “Who can know God’s counsel, or who can conceive what the Lord intends” (Wisdom 9:13). We marvel at the great honor God has bestowed upon this diminutive woman. We marvel at how God used her tired and frail fingers to be the instruments of his love. But we also wonder why God allows such poverty to exist in our world.

Looking at such poverty, Mother Teresa did not shy away from it, overwhelmed by its immensity, but instead did all she could to come to the aid of the dying poor in the streets of Calcutta, one person at a time. She opened her heart to each one and embraced them with her love. When she saw their poverty, she saw an opportunity for her to help

them grow in faith, hope, and love, and for them to help her grow in holiness by giving and receiving the love of Jesus.

Having lived a life of such heroic and generous love, Mother Teresa approached Jesus at the end of her earthly life carrying her cross and the crosses of countless others. Now she shines as one of the great lights illuminating the path of holiness for us so that we might be with Jesus forever. Her canonization is an inspiration, but also a challenge for us: will we follow her example?

To be a saint means to live a life of holiness. We grow in holiness by following Jesus as His disciples. In today's Gospel passage from Saint Luke, Jesus tells us that discipleship demands single-minded loyalty. It demands total and complete focus on the kingdom of God. Absolute loyalty to Jesus and His mission is required of every disciple. It even surpasses the loyalty demanded by one's family. Every disciple of Jesus must be prepared to endure suffering. Jesus says we must carry our own crosses. Being a follower of Jesus requires the willingness to suffer what He suffered. Discipleship also means that everything—including possessions—must take second place to the kingdom of God.

Closely related, then, to the notion of discipleship is the concept of stewardship. In the First Letter of St. Peter, he writes of stewardship in

these words: "As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:10).

Last September, I published my second pastoral letter, called, *Ars Crescendi in Dei Gratia*, Latin for, "The Art of Growing in God's Grace." In it, I wrote, "The art of growing in God's grace is the key to growth in the Church. Building a culture of growth in the Church starts with inviting people to experience the love of Jesus Christ."

Over the past couple of years leading up to the publication of my pastoral letter last Fall, I have given much thought to how it is that we can begin a process of strategic planning for growth in the Church here in our diocese. The growth envisioned is far more than just a quantitative increase in the number of people or the amount of money available to our parishes and the diocese. It is also essential to ensure that we give significant attention to the qualitative growth that will guarantee sustainability for generations that follow.

In my pastoral letter, I said that we must do four things to build a vibrant community of saints:

1. Invite people to join us in prayer, especially Sunday Mass (hospitality);

2. Study the Bible and learn more about Jesus and our Catholic faith (formation);

3. Provide the sacraments as signs of hope and paths of grace to heaven (prayer); and

4. Serve those in need by practicing charity and justice (service).

The verbs in these four action items correspond to the four pillars of stewardship and discipleship that we have begun talking about in our diocese: hospitality, formation, prayer and service. We can all communicate more broadly the message of invitation.

Through prayer, discernment, and consultation with others, it has become evident that the Lord is inviting us to embrace more fully our call to discipleship out of which necessarily follows a life of stewardship.¹

Stewardship recognizes that everything we have comes from God. We are stewards whether we recognize it or not and whether we like it or not. Stewardship from God's perspective is that He has given us gifts to be used not just selfishly for ourselves, but to be shared with others. Becoming a disciple means making an intentional decision to accept the Lord's call to follow Him and live the discipleship and stewardship way of life.

I am aware that such a plan for growth is ambitious, but it is one about which I am very optimistic, especially given what this diocese has to offer and the many ways in which various groups are already poised to contribute to that growth. A key group that is essential to this plan for growth is the priests of our diocese, especially our pastors. But they cannot do this alone. They need the help and cooperation of all parishioners. To be able to put into practice the mission of Jesus, we need to be part of a team supporting each other.

I pray that all of you will work with Sr. Mary Jean Traeger, O.P., Pastoral Facilitator here at St. Frances Xavier Cabrini Parish, and Father Clint Honkomp, O.P., Priest Moderator, in seeking to be intentional disciples of the Lord and good stewards of the gifts entrusted to us for the growth of the Church as we journey together toward our inheritance in the glory of Heaven.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, 1992, p. 8; <http://www.usccb.org/upload/stewardship-disciples-response-10th-anniversary.pdf>.