

## Encuentro Mass

October 6th, 2019 – 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

St. Boniface Catholic Church  
Edwardsville, Illinois

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“The apostles said to the Lord...” It’s a simple enough phrase. Yet the last time the apostles spoke in Luke’s Gospel was 5 chapters ago. Since then Jesus has given dozens of parables using the images of masters, vinedressers, mustard seeds, banquets, towers, finding sheep, coins, and sons, stewards, and the poor Lazarus. He had healed cripples, a man with dropsy, and attended dinners. He has taught about watchfulness, judgement, repentance, discipleship, mercy, adultery, and eternal life... And now the apostles approach, will all this on their hearts, with all these questions and concerns on their minds, they come, like us, to *encounter* Christ, to learn what He means by all this, what He asks of us by all this, what He gives us in all of this.

*Encounter.* Christ encounters us at all times, especially through the sacraments, but I think today He reminds us of His presence to us in other ways, more simple, constant, and ordinary ways, but in places that truly transform us, day after day, to greater and greater conformity with Him.

The first is like that of the *servant encountering the Master*. We are servants of God, we are entrusted like the servants in our Gospel, with labor of all kinds. This is the sacred task given to us in the beginning, when God entrusted Adam and Eve with “tilling and keeping” creation. In all the ways we work to sustain ourselves, to care for the world, our children, all that is our responsibility, the property around our parishes or communities, and any of the “flocks” found on our desks, around our homes, in our vehicles, or on our computers ... by working in all those ways, we act like Christ, who for most of His time on earth, was a manual laborer, building, crafting, planning, selling, and laboring with His hands. Let us not underestimate the value of our labors! St. Paul speaks of it in our second reading as the first of three dispositions given to us by the Holy Spirit. “God did not give us a spirit of timidity ... *but a spirit of power.*” To expend our energies even here below are moments sacred in God’s eyes. They are a living out of the power and creativity that God entrusted to humanity from the beginning, and

tremendous opportunities to serve Our Father, as Jesus did, during those many years, by beginning our work in prayer, by doing it for the good of others, and by dedicating our efforts to God.

On the western wall of this Church 4 new images of saints have been recently dedicated. One of them, St. John Paul II, models for us the sanctity of a *servant*, and the dignity and holiness of work. While he was in his 20s, having lost his parents, having his beloved Poland overrun by Nazi's and then Communists, and now forced out of his studies and budding career as an actor to be a manual laborer in a mine and then chemical plant, and yet it was in those rugged days that one of his fellow laborers remarked that he would make a good priest. He learned from those men perseverance, brotherhood, tenacity, and hope in the midst of tremendous trials, and they offered him time and space for prayer, contemplation, and gratitude, when many would have only been ground down by loss and hardship. He only did what he was commanded to, and yet by seeing it with trust in Divine Providence, looking back he was able to see there his first seminary, and the forge that made him the strong and patient saint that he would become.

*Encounter.* We encounter Christ not merely as servants, for how often, like those He speaks of in the Gospel, do we too find ourselves "unworthy

... we have only done what was our duty". Our daily work, actions, service, and obedience are all too often imperfect, unthinking, or fall into selfishness and self-ambition. God, in the beginning, created us to "be fruitful and multiply", to give of ourselves, to care for others, to not become attached to our works, but to sacrifice them to Him, modeling our creativity after His, yet how many times do we fall short?! In this situation, we find ourselves *sinner*s, encountering Christ as our *Savior*. Paul's words to Timothy again recognize the grace of this recognition, for the antidote to our fallenness is the Spirit's gift, again not "a spirit of timidity", but of "self-control". The moment we humbly recognize ourselves to be sinners, turning over our fallenness and misdirected love to Him, Our Savior, He can replace that weakness with His strength, that vice with the self-control that comes from gradually being imbued with the grace of the Spirit.

A second of those saints in particular reminds us of this work of Christ as He encounters us in our sin. St. Claire is another model given to us, and one that splendidly embodies that gift of the Love of God transforming a life to be entirely dedicated and directed towards Him. Born a rich little girl, it was the witness of St. Francis of Assisi that transfixed her, she was given the grace to turn aside from every attachment of riches or honor, rejecting

magnificent suitors, the power of her noble family, and the riches that were hers to inherit, because she had allowed God's Spirit into her life, and found in that gift, the grace to turn away from every temptation away from God, and to trust Him entirely. She ran away from home, shorn her hair, took on the poor habit of St. Francis, and would never leave San Damiano, where that little community of Poor Clares started, again in her life. Her words sum up what her life exemplifies: "*I need to be absolved from my sins, but I do not wish to be absolved from the obligation of following Jesus Christ.*"

It is every day that we can encounter Christ as our Master - in our labors - and our Savior - in our sins - but there is a final *encounter* that He offers us, just as He did His apostles that day. In the face of all their questions, fears, struggles, and sins, they beg Him "increase our faith!" And we, my brothers and sisters, must do the same! It is not enough to serve Him, nor to repent, we must also continuously ask for the eyes of faith, to see ourselves not merely as servants, nor sinners, but also *sons*. In the beginning, God also made us in His own "image and likeness," and it is in that image that we, like God, are capable of replanting trees in the ocean. I think this especially is a powerful image because it captures the odd and

paradoxical position that God invites us to take in the world. We can fit in well enough as workers, or even as repentant-sinners – those are things that our world does not find odd – but a tree in the ocean??? An icon of God in you, in me, in our bodies, our words, our actions??? We must ask for the faith to see this in ourselves and those around us, and to allow His image to radiate through us! It is a final gift of the Spirit that Paul reminds us makes this possible: “God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of ... *love*”. It is *love* that allows us to exemplify God in our lives, love that made us sons of the Eternal Father, and *love* that is the basis and height of every *encounter* with have with Christ.

A third character, our own Venerable Augustine Tolton, models a life filled with God’s love for us. He, surrounded by the stormy seas of slavery, rejection, bigotry, jealousy, and worldly-weariness, absolutely shone with God’s love. It was a love he realized in his early years of catechism and serving at Mass, a love that propelled Him to overcome obstacle after obstacle to follow the Lord’s call to priesthood, and a love that brought him back to his home, to preach the Gospel and pour himself out for all entrusted to his care. In his heart, we see love alight, and we ourselves encounter God

in the fruit that he miraculously bore out of the tumult and darkness that were his own surroundings.

May his intercession, and the intercession of Ss. Clare and John Paul II, teach us to encounter Christ at every moment that He approaches us. Today, let us choose to receive that encounter, to open ourselves to His grace, to avail ourselves of His Spirit, and never be afraid to witness to that encounter as servants, sinners, and saints-in-the-making.

May God give us this grace. Amen.