

August 30, 2015 Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Sunday Readings. This homily was also the homily for the Installation Mass for Father German Perez-Diaz as Pastor of Sts. John and Bernard Parish in Benton Harbor**

What a great joy it is for all of us to come together here this afternoon for this very special and joyful event. While it's only been a little more than six weeks since Father German has been your pastor, I'm sure that it's been long enough for you to come to realize what a good, loving, energetic and holy priest he is, and I'm sure you are already seeing within him the signs of the very loving pastor and good shepherd Fr. German is, patterned after the heart of the Good Shepherd Himself. Even though he officially became your pastor effective on July 8th, this evening, right after my Homily, we will ceremoniously and liturgically celebrate his "Installation" as your Pastor, along with his official appointment as the Dean of the Lakeshore Deanery.

The Liturgical Installation of your new pastor is an act of "entrustment" from me as the Bishop to Fr. German so that he can represent me to you, the faithful members of Sts. John and Bernard Parish. It's also the transference of leadership from your previous pastor, Fr. Bill Jacobs, to your current pastor, Fr. German Perez-Diaz. That handing on of leadership from one pastor to another has happened many times over the years, first of all in St. John Parish which traces its beginnings back to 1891, and then when St. Bernard Parish was established in 1961 with those many pastors, including our beloved Msgr. Gene Sears who is here with us this evening, and finally over these most recent, almost 20 years that this parish has been united as Sts. John and Bernard Parish.

Fr. German, as pastor of this parish community, you are charged with the same basic responsibilities as all your predecessors had here----which is the same responsibility as every pastor has, including me as the pastor of this entire Diocesan Church---namely: to teach the faith, to lead your people to Christ and to help guide them to their eternal salvation.

The scripture readings we've just listened to on this, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, are so appropriate for this special moment in the life of this parish community because each of the passages from God's Holy Word this afternoon take us back to the basics of what it means for us to be a community of faith.

The First Reading from the Book of Deuteronomy showed us Moses----in his role as teacher, leader and sanctifier of the people of Israel---reminding them about their basic responsibilities to God: *“Now Israel, hear the statutes and decrees which I am teaching you to observe...which the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you....You shall not add to what I command you or subtract from it.”* Moses was very clear with the People because God had been very clear to him, as to what he was to teach and how the people were supposed to live according to that teaching.

Fr. German, you and Moses have a lot in common. Just as Moses was the chosen leader/teacher/sanctifier of God’s Holy People, so too have you been chosen to lead, teach and help your people to become holy. Your responsibility is not to come up with your own plan of salvation; no, your responsibility is to teach God’s Plan----God’s Word----to help your people to understand and embrace God’s Holy Will, through the Gospel of Jesus and the teachings of the Church. And you, dear people, this reading reminds us that it’s not just Fr. German who is responsible to teach God’s love and God’s ways----it’s you too.

As you come here to the parish church to be “formed” by the living word of God and to be “nourished” by the life-giving Holy Eucharist, in turn you are to go back home---to the domestic church, or the church of the home, and “teach” your children God’s ways, and to make sure that you are forming your family according to God’s “statutes and decrees” as well as the teachings of Jesus and the Church.

That’s what St. James was teaching us so clearly in this afternoon’s Second Reading: *“Humbly welcome the Word that has been planted in you....Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only.”* What Fr. German does here at the Parish Church in matters of teaching and passing on the faith can only be effective to the degree that you, dear parishioners of Sts. John and Bernard, choose to live out your faith, pass your faith on to the next generation, and put your faith into practice in the church of the home----in your daily lives.

Jesus is very clear in today’s Gospel Reading: He’s not looking for us to pay Him “lip service”; Jesus becomes quite impatient with those whom He calls “hypocrites”----those who say one thing but do something quite different. Jesus wants us to be faithful, honest and genuine in the ways we choose to follow Him in our lives.

Moses asked a very important question of the Israelite people: “How many other nations are there whose pagan gods care enough for their people to give them laws and commands?” But Jesus asks another much more important question: “Why do you disregard God’s commandments and cling to human traditions?” When we observe God’s commandments and embrace Jesus’ teachings and the teachings of the Church, we are proving, not only that we are wise, but that we want to be as close to God as God wants to be close to us.

We absolutely need the Church as we experience it here at the Parish, and we clearly need you, Fr. German, to be a loving pastor, a gentle shepherd, and a strong teacher of the faith---to be one who represents Jesus Himself and brings Jesus to your people. We need the parish church to be strong and vibrant so that you, dear people, can receive the Eucharist, go to confession, receive the sacraments, be taught about our faith in the nearby LMC Catholic schools, in the great CCD classes and adult faith formation programs here at the parish, and so that you can put the spiritual and corporal works of mercy into practice to reach out to the poor in acts of charity and justice through the Catholic Community Center and other wonderful charitable programs already in place.

Pope Francis recently wrote this beautiful description of what every parish is and should strive to be: “The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory....an environment for hearing God’s Word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities, the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities.”

Father German, you are the pastor of this “community of communities”. I have every confidence that you will be a wonderful pastor for the people entrusted into your care. The most important advice I can give you is to urge you to love your people with the Heart of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

And dear People of God, the most important thing I can ask of you is to love your pastor, and follow him with confidence. Strive to work with him for the sake of the unity of the parish and the building up of the Body of Christ here in this part of the Diocese of Kalamazoo.

As I assure you, Father German and your dear People of God, of my prayers for you as you begin this new chapter of your parish’s history, I ask you to please pray for me as well. For as a diocese, we can only move forward in faith if we are

united in Christ. As you live the joy of the Gospel here in Benton Harbor, joined with all the other parishes throughout the diocese, we will remain united with the universal Church through our chief shepherd, Pope Francis, the Vicar of Christ on earth.

This is the basic plan of action for our faith: a bishop's love for his diocese----a pastor's love for his parish----parishioners' love for their church----all of this in our oneness with Jesus our Savior. It is He who always remains the teacher, and the One who shows us what it means to "lay down our lives" in sacrificial and saving service for those He loves as we experience it here really, truly, personally and powerfully at every celebration of the Holy Eucharist, the "source and summit of our Catholic faith". May we live the faith, teach the faith, spread the faith, and defend the faith with the love and the joy of Christ all the days of our lives, in this world and in the life of the world to come.

God bless you, now and always!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+ Bishop Paul J. Bradley