

## Vigil Mass, 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Closing Mass Diocesan New Evangelization Convocation/

October 14, 2017      Hackett Catholic Prep      4:15 p.m.

***“To our God and Father, glory forever and ever. Amen!”***

These words of praise that St. Paul wrote to his dear friends in the Church of Phillipi, which we just heard in our Second Reading, may very well be the same words of praise that are filling our hearts as we celebrate this Closing Mass of our annual New Evangelization Convocation. All that we do, and everything that makes up who we are, in the final analysis, should be about giving glory and praise to our Loving God and Father!

I am very pleased to join with all of you who have participated in this 2<sup>nd</sup> of our two days of reflecting on our calling to be “missionary disciples”.

As the Church continues to help us through the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and the insights from the various Synods of Bishops and the writings of our Holy Fathers in recent years, we come to a deeper, and richer, understanding of what it means for all of us to be baptized into the Body of Christ. We have grown profoundly in our understanding that being Catholic involves much more than passively coming to Mass and following the commandments.

Our Baptism creates at least two essential roles in our lives: 1) it activates us to a lifetime Vocation of growing in holiness in union with Jesus our Lord and Savior, the Head of the Body and the Source of the life of the Church, and 2) it commissions us to be, what Pope Francis has come to identify as, Joyful Disciples. Our lives are all about living IN this world while not allowing the ways of the world to distract us from embracing the ways of God; while at the same time, our lives are supposed to be about not just living as joyful disciples, but sharing the Good News of Jesus to those who do not know the Gospel----that is, to be “missionary disciples”. That has ALWAYS been God’s Plan, even if we are only recently becoming aware of what that means in our lives.

That’s why this Diocesan Convocation is SO important, and why I’m so very pleased that you have been able to participate: to be able to listen to the excellent Keynote Speakers we have been privileged to have with us for these two days, Damon and Melanie Owens, as well as to have been enriched by the many other workshops and sessions to help us grow in our

understanding of who we are and what our Baptismal Vocation requires of us in what the Church has come to know as the New Evangelization.

It's important, of course, for us to realize that the "new" part refers to US, not to the Gospel. There is no new Gospel that we're preaching, and no new Revelation that has come from God. The Gospel/the Good News of Jesus remains "the same yesterday, today and forever". God has sent His Son to save us; Jesus has taken on our human nature while maintaining his divinity; He has taught us, been One with us, and has loved us so totally and unconditionally that He has suffered, died, been buried, and Risen in Glory to bring about our salvation and the redemption of all humanity! That Good News has changed the world forever; that Gospel is what offers each of us the gift of eternal life.

But if that Gospel is SO special, and if that Good News is SO life-changing and essential for our eternal destiny, then WHY aren't we living our lives with a greater sense of Joy; WHY aren't we more enthused about sharing this Good News with those who don't know Jesus? THAT's what the Church is calling us to see as "new" in regard to the New Evangelization----OUR role in spreading the Good News is "new"; OUR responsibility for living the Gospel and going out "on mission" to share that Good News with those who are deprived of Faith is something that is new to most of us.

Pope St. John Paul told us that we all need to proclaim the Gospel "with new ardor, new methods and new expression."

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI told us: "The New Evangelization is new, not in content, but rather in its inner thrust; new in its methods that must correspond to the times; and new because it is necessary to proclaim the Gospel to those who have already heard it.

And our current Holy Father, Pope Francis, has devoted most of his teachings, and provided us with this beautiful Apostolic Exhortation entitled "*Evangelii Gaudium*"/"*The Joy of the Gospel*" which provides for us the directions that the church needs to be moving during these times of global secularization and an increased sense of more and more people who think and live like they have no need for God. As Pope Francis says in "*The Joy of the Gospel*": "*In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization.*" (# 119)

As the wider culture rejects God, or at the very least are ignorant of God and the Good News of Jesus, we are “impelled”----“driven”----commissioned, in Pope Francis’ words, to go to the peripheries of society to share the Gospel.

Too many of us, and when I say “us”, I mean ALL of us: bishops, priests, deacons, lay leaders----we may still be working very hard at producing the same parish programs and ministries; I’m sure we are celebrating vibrant Masses and encouraging participation in the Sacraments’ and yet fewer and fewer people come to Mass; Young People (the Millennials) are practically invisible in our parishes; and our Vocations to the Priesthood, Religious Life and even the Sacrament of Marriage continue to decline.

The New Evangelization “impels” us to realize that we MUST move from, what Pope Francis terms, “maintenance to mission”. The Gospel is for ALL people, not just the 25-30 % of Catholics who come to Mass on a regular basis; the Good News of Salvation must be proclaimed to ALL people, not just the less than 50% of people in our 9 counties (on average) who identify as a member of some formalized religion/faith tradition. Those numbers are startling, because that means that 70-75% of our registered Catholics are not with us; more than 50 % of our friends and neighbors living around us are NONEs---no religious affiliation. They’re probably good people; they’re those that admit they’re “spiritual but not religious”; they may be ones who admit some belief in a Higher Power. But they are deprived of the Gospel; they are in jeopardy of losing their eternal salvation!

Pope Francis reminds us: “All people have a right to come to know the Gospel of Jesus Christ; ALL Christians have a duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone.” From the beginning when God revealed Himself to humanity through the Patriarchs, Prophets, and Holy men and women of Old Testament, and most especially, through His Son Jesus and the Church in the New Covenant, God’s intention was for ALL people to know, follow, serve and love Him and one another. That’s why today’s Scripture Readings are so powerful, and so very appropriate for all of us focused on the New Evangelization.

That’s what we heard Isaiah proclaiming in the First Reading: the Lord of Hosts provides not only “*a feast of rich foods and choice wines*” for ALL people, Todas, and All nations---todas las naciones; but also, the Lord God will wipe the tears away from every face---cada cara; the reproach of His people would be removed from the whole earth---tierra entera! That was God’s Plan, and remains God’s Hope! But over and over again, people refused God’s invitation, and worked against His Plan.

And so that is why Jesus told the Parable that we heard in today's Gospel passage. He was again speaking to the chief priests and the elders of the people, and told this Parable as a way of teaching them to what the Kingdom of Heaven may be likened. We know the Parable well: Those invited to the wedding feast by the King for his son ignored the invitation; some made up excuses as to why they couldn't be there; some even resorted to abusing and killing the King's messengers who were trying to deliver the invitations. And so, the servants were sent to the highways and the byways, to "the peripheries and the margins", to invite whoever could be found so that the wedding reception for his son would be filled with people, good and bad alike.

My dear friends, that is the Church. The Church is not an exclusive club for those who are saved, or who just want to associate with like-minded people; rather, as Pope Francis likes to use the image, the Church is a "field hospital" where we come for healing, help and hope. Just because people do not come to the Church does not absolve the Church from going out to bring the Gospel to the people.

That is US, my dear sisters and brothers in Christ. We who know Jesus, and we who Love Jesus, and we who trust in the fact that Jesus loves, saves, and nourishes us in the Sacraments, are not just asked to volunteer to share that love; no, we are given a mandate by Jesus Himself: the most important of all the commandments is to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength; .and to love our neighbor as ourselves---and that means, to really love them, with the sacrificial and serving love of Christ. We are "impelled" by our Baptism to share the Good News of Jesus with those who have 100 different excuses, such as that they don't have time, or who decide they have better things to do.

St. Paul put it so well in today's Second Reading: *"I can do all things in Him who strengthens me."* That means it must begin with a strong and passionate Love for Jesus in our hearts, a Love which motivates us to live our lives as Joyful Disciples, and a Love which "impels" us to be missionary disciples. Along with St. Paul, let us take comfort in and be confident in the fact he teaches: *"My God will fully supply whatever you need...." WHATEVER you need.... "To our God and Father, glory forever and ever. Amen!*