

Encuentro Mass

April 10, 2019

Perhaps we sometimes feel like Shadrack, Meshack, and Abendnego! The white hot furnace seems to await us as we confront the problems of the Church and the world. Like King Nebachudnezar, the world tells us that our faith is worthless and that our God will not save us, but if we would only follow the ways of the world and pledge allegiance to its values all will be fine!

I hope we can be like the three young men in today's first reading! They remained steadfast, no matter how dire the threats against them! They simply refused to assent to Nebachudnezar's demands, and would not be unfaithful to the Lord God! The King raged against these young men, as the world sometimes rages against us! And like the three young men, the Lord remains with us, protecting us from destruction. Thus we are able to pray, along with the Psalmist, "Glory and Praise Forever!"

Jesus asks for faithfulness from His disciples in today's gospel reading. It is the same kind of faithfulness shown by the three young men. But Jesus asks for it in a particular way. He asks us to be faithful to the truth, and that the truth would set us free. More than just setting us free, faithfulness and truth will make us sons of God, sons and daughters of God! Faithfulness to God unleashes a powerful grace within our lives: the grace to be God's own children, co-heirs of the Kingdom with Christ, as St. Paul tells us.

I ask you to consider all of this in the light of the Quinto Encuentro, as we have been considering it in our Archdiocese over this past year. The Encuentro is not about a new gospel, but about faithfulness in our time to the timeless Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is about helping

each other to be sons and daughters of God, about the meaning of being brothers and sisters to one another.

Each of you, along with your office and department coworkers, has been considering concrete ways to make the Encuentro effective in your service or ministry. This is critically important to our overall ministry of service to the whole Archdiocese, and to the integrity of our relationships with one another. We serve as a model of what we are calling the whole People of God in the Archdiocese to do! It is not a question of whether we can do it perfectly, but if we can do it faithfully!

Three years ago I asked the entire staff of the Pastoral Center to begin working in Pastoral Conjunto, that is, service and ministry performed together. In this way of service and ministry we support one another, share in one another's joys and successes, and help to heal each other's wounds and disappointments. Pastoral Conjunto is a living manifestation of encounter, in the way our Holy Father, Pope Francis means it. This is not anything flashy or trendy! Just the opposite, in a world where we are taught to compete instead of to share, this is something very counter-cultural!

As we come together today, let us do so with renewed hope and a commitment to the kind of faithfulness that leads to a life of freedom in God's truth, a faithfulness that makes of us sons and daughters of God, a faithfulness that makes of us brothers and sisters to one another.