

**Homily – Memorial of St. Vincent de Paul – September 27, 2021
Blessing of Polish Heritage Center – Immaculate Conception, Panna Maria**

I am sure that many of you might have a clear image of what this place looked like in the 1850's. But most of all, this land had a promising meaning for Fr. Leopold Moczygamba and the first Silesian settlers of Panna Maria. That profound significance still speaks loudly to us today about the identity of this town. Even St. John Paul II said here – 34 years ago this month – that everyone in Poland remembered Fr. Moczygamba and the people who left for Panna Maria. “When we meet Polish immigrant communities anywhere in the world,” he said, “our thoughts turn to the homeland.” So, not only do these walls and fields connect us to people who arrived here beginning in 1854, but they are a connection to their roots, to over a millennium of Christianity in Poland, and so on. History tells us who we are, which is important because knowing who we are, we know who we ought to be.

Pope Francis says that: “The transmission of the faith not only brings light to men and women in every place; it travels through time, passing from one generation to another. Because faith is born of an encounter which takes place in history and lights up our journey through time, it must be passed on in every age. It is through an unbroken chain of witnesses that we come to see the face of Jesus. ... Persons always live in relationship. We come from others, we belong to others, and our lives are enlarged by our encounter with others. ... Self-knowledge is only possible when we share in a greater memory. The same thing holds true for faith, which brings human understanding to its fullness. ... The love which is the Holy Spirit and which dwells in the Church unites every age and makes us contemporaries of Jesus, thus guiding us along our pilgrimage of faith.” The Church is God's People, walking together in a spirit of synodality throughout the centuries.

Zechariah, in the first reading today, brings fantastic news to the people. It is a promise, impregnated with hope, which opens up a bright new horizon for their future. “I will rescue my people from the land of the rising sun, and from the land of the setting sun. I will bring them back to dwell

within Jerusalem.” God is determined to save his people, although for many it still seemed like wishful thinking. Many were later disappointed because the prophecies were not fulfilled the way they had envisioned them. Even in the gospel today we see the apostles continuing to argue about their worldly views and concerns, which are radically different from God’s expectations.

Likewise, the founders of Panna Maria could not have imagined what would become of the hopeful vision that Fr. Moczygamba had shared with them. Their life struggles certainly did not end as they arrived to America. But they did not lose courage. They kept the faith and their hope alive.

There is a fundamental difference between wishful thinking and hope. The latter is the product of our imagination, which does not correspond to reality. Hope is rooted in faith, which is our response to the Word that God speaks to us about Himself. He is at the same time the beginning and the end. By revealing Himself to us, he also reveals us who we really are. So hope is the continuation of the path begun by faith. It is the journey to the One who makes reality “real”, in other words **meaningful, worth engaging!**

The Polish Heritage Center that is being blessed today is meant to connect people to their past – whether they were born here or not – but also to their future. It is meant to help us become like children again, in our sense of detachment, innocence, openness and freedom. But how can an old person become like a child? In a different passage, Nicodemus said to Jesus: “How can a person once grown old be born again? Surely he cannot reenter his mother’s womb and be born again, can he?” Jesus answered: “What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit.” (Jn 3: 4.6). Wishful thinking is no source of joy for an old person, but hope is like a breath of fresh air while contemplating a beautiful Texas sunset, with the sure knowledge that sunrise will be even more beautiful. Take courage! Keep passing on the faith!

Mary, Queen of Poland, / I am close to you, I remember you, / I keep watch. *Maryjo, Królowo Polski, / jestem przy Tobie, pamiętam o Tobie / I czuwam na każdy czas.*