

Talk – 1. Encountering Christ to Live our Priestly Vocation Today Priestly Encounter, Archdiocese of Seattle – June 17, 2024

Dear brothers in Christ, the foundation of our priestly life is our relationship with Jesus. This is obvious, but so is the fact that we must remind ourselves of it every day. As Pope Francis frequently reminds us, we must be men who have a deep, personal relationship with the Lord. This relationship is not static; it requires daily renewal through prayer, charity, and the sacraments. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis famously states, (quote) “The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, and loneliness.” (end of quote).¹ This joy and freedom are essential for us to effectively minister to others.

In the words of the Pope, the Church is called to go forth as (quote) “a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others... An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others.” (end of quote).² As priests, we are entrusted with the sacred duty of leading the Lord’s flock to a life-

¹ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 1.

² *Evangelii Gaudium*, No. 24.

changing encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the very heart of our priestly calling – to proclaim the Good News and draw all people into the transformative love of God.

Saint Augustine reminds us of the gravity of this responsibility, saying (quote) “There are many who, being Christians, without being in front of others, reach God, perhaps walking lighter, carrying a smaller load. We, on the contrary, leaving aside the fact that we are Christians, which is why we must give an account to God of our lives, are also leaders, which is why we must give an account to God of our ministry.” (end of quote).³ We are not merely institutional figures, but rather, as the Second Vatican Council exhorted, we must be (quote) “authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach the faith to the people assigned them.” (end of quote).⁴ And as Pope St. Paul VI taught in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, our duty is to bring the faithful into a living, personal relationship with the Lord, for (quote) “primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus- the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity.” (end of quote).⁵

In the image and likeness of the Blessed Trinity, revealed to us by Jesus Christ in word and deed – particularly from the Cross – we are called to foster relationships and unity. This requires us to be open, trusting, and hopeful for the fresh developments that

³ Sermon 46, No. 2.

⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, No. 25.

⁵ St. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No. 41.

God's kingdom aims to bring about, even now. We must stay engaged with our communities, like the Good Shepherd who knows and names each sheep. Through humble faith and service, we can encourage others to pursue a life of genuine discipleship. No task, however significant, should divert us from the spiritual focus essential to our apostolic mission received at ordination. Our main responsibility is to proclaim Christ, as only through knowing, loving, and emulating Him can we transform history by infusing society and culture with Gospel values. Visiting, listening carefully to fellow priests and the faithful, and directly engaging with the marginalized is essential to our pastoral leadership. In these personal interactions, we encounter Christ in our people, reigniting our passion for the Gospel.

Pope Francis encourages us to embrace the Lord's call to build a synodal and missionary Church with enthusiasm. This involves creating a spirit of unity and shared responsibility within our communities, recognizing and empowering the various gifts of the laity for evangelization. The Second Vatican Council highlights the importance of identifying and nurturing the diverse charismatic gifts of the laity, whether modest or prominent, as they are crucial for evangelizing in numerous human situations and contexts. Our people have an instinct for discovering new paths; they possess the "sensus fidei", the infallibly true sense of the faith. We need to be receptive to the Holy Spirit's guidance, who is already active in our flock. We need to join them in the mission of discipleship.

Brothers, empowered by the joy of having encountered the Lord – especially at the celebration of the Eucharist – let us follow

the Church's call to go out, welcome, seek, and bring love, mercy, and tenderness. When hearts are open to the Gospel, transformative change begins, and humanity is renewed. Let us be men of the Eucharist, compassionate to those who suffer, and witnesses to the Lord's ever-present mercy. In this manner, we will truly foster relationships and unity, remaining open, trusting, and hopeful for the newness that God's kingdom seeks to manifest even today.

May Our Lady of Guadalupe help us allow the Holy Spirit to lead us in this mission, refreshing our hearts and empowering us to guide our people into a transformative encounter with Christ.