

Order of Malta Retreat  
February 5-7, 2016  
Bethany Retreat Center

*"The Name of God is Mercy"*

Talk #4: Where do we go from here? TO ACTION

- I. Challenge of the Moment
  - A. There is an urgency regarding all that we have discussed
    - i. Pope Francis's reception by people illustrates
      - 1. "Window of Opportunity"
      - 2. Outlining a methodology by which to deal with it
  - B. There is a profound development in the notion of Evangelization underway in Pope Francis that is touching the lives of many people
    - i. It is what the Pope describes as "Missionary Discipleship (Chapt. One)"
      - 1. Mission= BRING THE MESSAGE OF MERCY THAT COMES FROM THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST
  - C. Raising a Question that is at the heart of modern life:
    - i. Why do I need to be part of the Catholic community?
      - 1. Results from Notre Dame study re: young people
    - ii. Credibility of the ecclesial community re-established through effective acts of mercy and love
- I. What is Missionary Discipleship?
  - a. What does "MISSION" mean?
    - i. Story: 9/11 attack and the marine
      - 1. "You are my mission"
    - ii. STORY illustrates key ingredients to any Mission
      - 1. *Mission = To go forth with a clear purpose...*
        - a. In our case: to spread the Good News of Salvation in Christ
  - b. POPE FRANCIS: TWO ELEMENTS that will have profound effect on our concrete ministry in parishes and schools

- i. FIRST ELEMENT: TO EFFECTIVELY “GO OUT” TO THOSE IN NEED
  - 1. Two examples:
    - a. Story: the couple who came to offertory
    - b. Story: Embrace of man with disabilities
  - 2. Two interesting observations in these examples:
    - a. “GONE OUT”
      - i. WAS NOT ABLE TO CORRECT THE PROBLEM but stood in SOLIDARITY with those in NEED
    - b. “NEED”
      - i. Was not always material poverty but POVERTY in ALL ITS ASPECTS
    - c. POINT:
      - i. THE CHURCH of 2025: MUST FIND LOCAL WAYS TO GIVE CREDIBLE EXPRESSION TO OUR MISSION=
        - 1. WORKS OF MERCY and of CHARITY
        - 2. AND THEREBY REDISCOVER JOY!  
(=EVANGELIZATION)
  - 3. TWO POWERFUL REASONS FOR THIS CREDIBLE WITNESS:
    - a. Within the Church:
      - i. To reestablish the credibility of who we are to those who have left
        - 1. How?
          - a. New form of clericalism
          - b. Loss of credible acts of love that give witness to our words of love
      - ii. KEY EXAMPLE: Abuse scandals have broken trust with the leadership within the Church
        - 1. Point: Most vulnerable were hurt
        - 2. Failure of compassion and love
    - b. Outside the Church:
      - i. We have been reduced to a “human institution” beside others
        - 1. No special claim to do anything other than what the others are doing
      - ii. Three great enemies of the Church

1. Indifference
2. Mediocrity
3. Complacency
  - a. Same enemies to MERCY
4. In a religion where
  - a. LOVE is the central mystery of Faith
    - i. Trinity: community of Love
    - ii. Incarnation: enfleshing of Love for our sake
    - iii. CROSS: Place where that LOVE HEALS AND FREES ME
  - b. If LOVE IS NOT CREDIBILITY WITNESSED, then
    - i. RELIGION: set of rules and regulations
    - ii. Institution is simply a structure of power (esp. male dominance)
      1. ALL MYTH!
5. Pope Francis: CHALLENGING US TO re-establish the credibility to the claim that God is LOVE and He is found in our midst
  - a. YOUNG PEOPLE:
    - i. "Get it"
      1. Service is the entry to religious formation
    - ii. Basic Feeling: Many feel neither loved or loveable
6. WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY?
  - a. MERCY AND COMPASSION is at the HEART OF CATECHESIS
    - i. Contemporary examples:
      1. Ecclesial Movements catechesis
        - a. Neo-Catechumenal Way
  - b. MERCY AS CONSTITUTIVE OF DISCIPLESHIP:
    - i. WORKS OF CHARITY AND MERCY are not reserved for Thanksgiving our parishes and schools
      1. Ongoing essential part of our life and preaching
    - ii. SECOND ELEMENT: HIS MISSION ONE PERSON AT A TIME

1. Examples:
  - a. Story: Rio de Janeiro and the Boy
  - b. Story: kissing feet of the Muslim girl
  
2. Challenge to our ministries is enormous
  - a. TRUTH: We love programs, even when we live Mercy!
    - i. Why? Many reasons
      1. We need to effectively address as many needs as possible in an efficient and effective way
      2. We have limited resources
      3. Our people are conditioned
  
  - b. PROBLEM: ACCOMPANIMENT is lost!
  
- iii. NEW METHODOLOGY IS PROFOUND CHALLENGING:
  1. Story: As a little boy, the priest opened the door and they came to us
    - a. Now: We open the door and we go to them!
  
  2. Pope' DREAM: Transformation and renewal of the Church in MISSION
    - a. "I dream of a "missionary option" that is, missionary impulse of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than its self preservation."
  
3. WHAT WILL IT REQUIRE? HUGE CHANGE
  - a. ENGAGEMENT OF THE LAITY of Baptismal Call: (Cross)
    - i. TRUTH:
      1. CLERICALIZED THE LAITY WITH MINISTRIES
    - ii. NEEDED?
      1. DISCERNMENT OF GIFTS AND TALENTS FROM EVERYONE
        - a. ARMY of PEOPLE for Mission that is not liturgical
  
  - b. REDISCOVERY OF COMMUNAL MISSION based on FAMILY
    - i. Mission went out two by two for support

1. NOW CAN YOU AND I IMAGINE PARISH LIFE IN SUCH TERMS?

ii. LITMUS TEST: Real sisters and brothers through Grace

1. Story of Daddy

- a. "Blood is thicker than water"
- b. "Grace is thicker than blood"

c. CHALLENGE OF POPE FRANCIS? "GOOD NEWS" = "JOYFUL NEWS"

i. The word itself perhaps defines for us the task at hand

- 1. Father Barron in his series *Catholicism* reminds his audience that it was common practice in ancient Imperial Rome for the emperor to send out messengers to proclaim the eu-vangelium, "the good news" of his victories to his subjected people
  - a. The purpose of such Good News was clear:
    - i. The Emperor's reign remained intact, growing, and to be feared

ii. Evangelization literally means that: "good news"

- 1. Good news that invites a person to have a *personal encounter*= *know* and *love* the JESUS THE CHRIST and to seek an enduring relationship with him through the community of believers

iii. GOOD NEWS that begins NOT with something but someone: JESUS THE CHRIST

- 1. Jesus the Christ who through word and sign proclaimed and established a Kingdom unexpected and unknown:

- a. CROSS: Someone who in his death and resurrection has shown himself to be the very Incarnation of Love Himself

- i. In-breaking of God into human life

- 1. Who has come to transform Life Itself

- b. Our Lord who remains in our midst in word and sacrament

- i. A Kingdom that is taking root through his Presence in the community of believers that is made credible

- ii. A community Born on the day of Pentecost, who guided and inspired by the power of the Spirit gave birth to the Scriptures, to a Living Tradition and a Magisterium whose authority rests in service to its Lord
- iii. We have encountered the Lord in a living community that proclaims Him in a credible way
  - 1. Family, Parish, Neighbors and even strangers....disciples all!
  - 2. A community that is CREDIBLE AS AN EXPRESSION OF GOD'S LOVE
    - a. It becomes the POWER behind evangelization

II. What will be the response?

- a. The POWER OF THIS INVITATION to a RELATIONSHIP with Christ and His Church will do four things:
  - 1. FIRST: It will touch each of us personally and ask a response in faith= PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD
    - a. To such love, a response of FAITH is offered
      - i. IN SHORT: Answer to the question:
        - 1. *"Who do you say that I am?"*
  - 2. SECOND: It will seek no compromise
    - a. Call of the apostles
      - i. *"To be covered in the Dust of a rabbi"*
  - 3. THIRD: Will change one's life and all its relationships
    - a. CONVERSION:
      - i. Reality of sin
    - b. METANOIA: "To turn away our face/mind"
      - i. To question one's own and the common way of living and to allow God's power to enter into the criteria of all that we do
        - 1. Esp. in my relationships with others
  - 4. FOUR: It will impel us to share WHO we have received

- a. I wish to share with others He who has changed my life  
NOT:
  - i. Simply a program, project or initiative
  - ii. Not in any uniform way
- b. Rather, the doorway for all evangelization is not first and foremost what we do or say but rather who we are
  - i. It is the holiness of our lives,
    - 1. That will allow the GOOD NEWS to be heard, encountered and believed!

II. THREE SPIRITUAL QUALITIES we need to foster MERCY in our lives:

- a. FIRST: Humility - the virtue that allows mercy to enter our hearts
  - i. Story: Albino Luciani (Pope John Paul I):
    - 1. When nominated as a Bishop, he said:
      - a. “The Lord preferred that certain things not be engraved in bronze or marble but in the dust, so that if writing had remained it would have been clear that the merit was all and only God’s.”
  - ii. Humility is simply living the truth:
    - 1. To think less: ingratitude
    - 2. To think more: pride
  - iii. Humility allows us to receive the mercy of God because as Beloved sinners, we can allow ourselves to be loved
    - 1. And in turn, give that same love away to others.
- b. SECOND: Courage- the virtue that sustains mercy in our lives
- c. COURAGE IS A virtue that is a divine gift:
  - i. One of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (Confirmation)
    - 1. THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO OVERCOME FEAR in all its forms
      - a. And FREES us to invest ourselves in the decisions we MAKE
      - b. to TAKE RISKS

- c. to STAND FIRM by our decisions despite the cost, fears and hazards that we may face in the process
- d. IT IS BOTH:
  - i. Human virtue that is found in all men and women, flowing from our creation in the image and likeness of God
    - 1. Joseph and Nicodemus: found the Truth and choose to stand by it.... Jesus!
  - ii. Supernatural virtue for those *baptized and confirmed* in the power of the Holy Spirit
    - 1. Example: Apostles after Pentecost
      - a. HS: Freely given to perfect what God began in us
      - b. Allow us to follow the Master's example.
- e. IT IS OUR SPIRITUAL ARMOR:
  - i. Armor is designed to protect whoever wears it, against attacks
    - 1. COURAGE is the spiritual gift that allows us to stand firm against such attacks and live what we hope
      - a. By living it, we strengthen it
      - b. By strengthening it, we give hope to others!
- f. COURAGE WAS NOT LACKING IN THE EARLY CHURCH
  - i. Martyrdom of early Church:
    - a. Example #1: *Via Appia Antica*
      - i. Dinner at Cecilia Matella
    - b. Example #2: Square of Saint Peter's Square
      - i. Reason: not to offer a single grain of incense to an image of the emperor!
  - 2. Earliest Christians were filled with courage:
    - a. Not because they had more of the Holy Spirit than we do!
    - b. Not because they had nothing to lose, already poor and outcast
    - c. KEY: they believed that the hazards of following Christ paled in comparison to the hazards that await those who do not!
- g. THIRD: JOY is the POWER BEHIND and FRUIT of ALL MERCY
  - ii. Remember:
    - 1. God does not ask us to do anything for which he does not give us the gift by which to do it



- a. To love effectively in mission (the prerequisite for all evangelization) can't be sustained without a divine gift of Joy)

- i. Joy:

- 1. A sublime gift
- 2. A divine gift
- 3. A gift that comes to us when we least expect it
  - a. A gift that will surprise us:

- b. Joy is badly misunderstood in our contemporary age because it is confused with another state of life....Happiness

- i. They are not the same thing:

- ii. Happiness is very important to Americans:

- 1. In the Declaration of Independence we hear that: "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" is our right
  - i. Nothing more American!

Definition: *all is going well at any given moment in my life*

- ii. I am content, right now
- iii. We avoid all suffering, pain or challenges: not make us happy

Problem: *never lasts* because it is dependent upon external circumstances that I have no control over:

- iv. Result: *pursuit of happiness is very frustrating!!!*
- v. We all know people who are consumed with the pursuit of happiness:

- iii. Christian joy, on the other hand, is very different from happiness:

- 1. St Paul (Phil. 4: 4-7): *"Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall do it again, Rejoice! Your kindness shall be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."*

- a. Joy is a deep and abiding sense of contentment that arises from one's relationship with God:

- b. Gift from God to realize: In the end all will be OK

Saint Juliana of Norwich: "...All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well"  
Saint Peter on the Water!

- Never dependent upon the external circumstances of life
    - Does not require possessions, success, etc.
  - Remains even when we suffer
    - Because we often have no one else to whom to turn who is always there!
  - So deep an emotion that words and thoughts cannot fully express it.
- i. Reason why joy is often expressed in tears

## II. MERCY gives birth to JOY:

- a. In TWO ways:
  - i. Allowing people to effectively experience THE "LOVING COUNTENANCE OF GOD"!
  - ii. Embracing their suffering and pain as a moment of love
- b. The Great challenge before us is to find effective and concrete ways by which we can introduce rekindle with ourselves and the children and adults entrusted to our care: the JOY OF CHRIST
  - i. For at least THREE REASONS:
    1. Joy = ANTEDOTE TO THE LIES OF THE WORLD
    2. Joy = ENTRY TO A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD
    3. Joy = INFECTIOUS INVITATION TO ALLOW OTHERS TO "SEE WHAT WE HAVE SEEN"

## III. CONCLUSION:

- a. One last suggestion:
  - i. Every room in our homes should have a cross
    - 1. As the mirror into our lives,
    - 2. As the birthplace of Mercy
    - 3. As the place where compassion is real
      - a. It should always remind us of what we are called to live
  - ii. In this time of great promise and urgency, the choice is ours
    - 1. Let us choose wisely, to the honor and glory of Christ.