

HOMILY

A great benefit of situating ourselves in the era of the Ninth Bishop of Des Moines – is that with the assurance of the past and confident likelihood of the future, we can concentrate on the present. What is our identity as the Church of Des Moines in the here and now? What are the implications for embodying this identity?

Pope Benedict titled his first encyclical: “Deus Caritas Est.” God is Love.... This identification points to the internal life of God, whose foundation is love. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in a dynamic of being for one another. The Holy Father characterizes this divine relationship and its outreach as the highest form of love.....agape.

...”this word expresses the experience of a love which involves a real discovery of the other moving beyond the selfish character ... Love now becomes concern and care for the other. No longer is it self-seeking, a sinking intoxication of happiness; instead it seeks the good of the beloved.” (Deus Caritas Est; #6)

Revelation unfolds the astounding truth that God shares this life of love with those of us made in his image and likeness. Moreover, we embrace the further astonishing news. The love which constitutes God is now able to be incorporated in our individual, personal existence. “The one who abides in love abides in God and God abides in that person.” (I JN 4:16)

The intermediary who seals the Divine – human relationship is Jesus the Christ, Son of God and Son of Mary. “God is flesh and blood, He is one of us. We know him by His Face, by His Name. Thus, we must enter into the knowledge of Jesus and then friendship with him in order to walk with him”. (Benedict XVI, L’Osservatore Romano, #8, February 20, 2008)

Jesus gave birth to the Church, the community of believers, in his Paschal mystery, his death, resurrection and ascension. He thus enabled the very life of God through the action of the Spirit to be one with our person, our flesh and blood as individuals, as community.

The description of the unifying/bonding and ongoing infusion of God’s life in both sustaining us and enabling us to be productive in love is captured in the image of the vine and branches. Jesus is the vine. We are the branches, totally dependent on him. We people of Iowa, situated in the heartland of America, can readily identify with this image. Year after year, we plant, cultivate and water corn, oats, alfalfa, hay, soybeans, sunflowers, wheat. At the same time we readily recognize the miracle of ongoing creation. It is the divine that accounts for miraculous growth. In union with that same divine person we humans derive life... that life in which we are productive, bearing fruit in that which has most meaning...love.

The life of God which pulsates in us is not an isolated phenomenon, Divine love is indivisible. It is the same Lord of love present in all creating unity among us.

Pope Benedict described this unity:

“Union with Christ is also union with all of those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians. We become “one body” completely joined in a single existence. Love of God and Love of neighbor are now truly united: God Incarnate draws all to himself.” (Deus Caritas Est; #14)

Because the Eucharist celebrates most profoundly our identity as “one Body” animated by God’s love, it was my heartfelt desire to join with as many as possible from this wonderful community of Southwest Iowa from day one. Hence the location of the Iowa Event Center for this celebration. Pope Benedict has reminded us that the Eucharist is not only static in nature but dynamic. This means that with a proper frame of mind and disposition the love of God expands in our individual and corporate heart when we celebrate this remarkable mystery. May it be so today and everyday we gather for Eucharist as the Church of Des Moines.

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Being one body alive in the Spirit and love of God gives rise to the Church as the Body of Christ thus establishing focus and purpose as community. In the letter to the Romans Paul described this mission of Church: “Though we are many, we are all one body in union with Christ, and we are all joined to each other as different parts of one body. So we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the Grace God has given us.” (Romans 12:5-6)

As the body of Christ, each of us members is endowed with personal talents and gifts. Together we are called to exercise these gifts to make Christ present and in so doing invite all to be drawn into and experience the light, life and truth of Jesus, Son of God....

- Bishop Charron on the occasion of his installation as Bishop of Des Moines reflected on the theme of servant. Jesus after washing the feet of his Apostles, directed them: “As I have done for you, so you must do for one another”. Each of us has the capacity to serve. All members active in service through the exercise of their individual talents are absolutely essential for the Body of Christ to come to full stature.
- Many receive a vocation to serve the Church explicitly as priests, deacons, religious, lay ecclesial ministers. This call like that of the apostles, disciples and companions of Jesus is to witness to the radical nature of the Gospel message. Through lives of sacrifice and vowed commitment, the vision of eternal life and the consequent implications for our present life are opened up to us.

- The overwhelming majority of the faithful are called to marriage and the sharing of passionate, life long love with a complementary partner. Bishop Maurice Dingman, the sixth Bishop of Des Moines, emphasized marriage and family as domestic Church. In this essential unit of life the love which is derivative of God is experienced in a natural, wholesome setting. “By the power of the Sacrament of Matrimony husband and wife fulfill their obligations to each other and to family and are filled with the spirit of Christ. This spirit fulfills their whole lives with faith, hope and love.” (Gaudium et Spes, N. 48) Thus, the family is a building block of the dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

- All of us can trace the origin of our personal existence to the creating hand of God. We are manifestations of his love. As members of the Body of Christ, each of us is called to protect, nurture and enhance the precious gift of human life from the moment of conception to natural death. Gospel teaching challenges us to build a culture of life where all are respected and are rendered the dignity to which each individual is entitled.

Such love institutionalized through direct service is rendered to those in need by Catholic Charities, Catholic Relief Services as well as the myriad of other religious, secular and governmental agencies. Pope Benedict observed: “As a community, the Church must practice love. Love, thus needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community”. (Deus Caritas Est, “Pope Benedict XVI) The Gospel story of Lazarus and the rich man points out that in the last analysis we are not owners but stewards of the world’s goods. Judgment will be based on how well I shared what I was given.

As the Body of Christ, we clothe ourselves with the mantle of social justice, a constituent element of the Gospel. We insist that all are guaranteed the basic human rights of food, education, health care, security, work, freedom of religious practice. We not only accept but welcome the enriching presence of newcomers among us. For us in this part of Iowa it means placing the welcome mat out for Latinos, Sudanese, and those from Asian nations.

Members of the Diocese of Des Moines have a particular voice to raise in the phenomenon of globalization. Our rich and productive land can be pivotal in addressing the unconscionable, ever present specter of world wide hunger. The area’s urban specialties of banking and insurance can also be utilized in the service of development and security thus becoming agents of the common good.

- A particularly important cohort for me in the Body of Christ are you – youth and young adults. My visit to Dowling Catholic High on April 10th the day of the announcement as your bishop was electrifying. Your spirit, vitality, idealism, openness, and energy encouraged me and once again underlined your essential role in our life together. Young people stand together as an emerging generation fired up by the love of Christ with high hopes for our world. Count me, one with a few less hairs, as your companion and friend.
- At the heart of being in the world as the Body of Christ is the witness we render and the influence we bring to bear on our culture – in work, in sports, music, movies, the internet, in our citizenship and in our myriad relationships.

This witness is exercised for the most part implicitly and is not a form of proselytizing but is based on our enduring relationship with Jesus and His Body and is rendered in love. It recognizes that all throughout the world are beloved sons and daughters of God therefore brothers and sisters to us. It is what we have come to know as the New Evangelization: Making Jesus Christ known and loved in our times by choosing to live out the Gospel at every moment.

John Gagliardi, the winningest football coach in the United States history and still active at St. John’s University in Collegeville was asked on the occasion of setting the record what his fundamental philosophy of coaching was. He left the interviewer speechless when he replied: “Mostly love and peace.”

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My coming among you as Ninth Bishop dawns a new day for all of us. We take a cue from ancient Israel. Humbled and crushed by its enemies, it once again faced the haunting question from its Exodus; “Is the Lord with us or not?” (Exodus 17:7)

The prophet Isaiah announced something brand new for Israel. The new Israel will be far different than before – not an insular, self-seeking people but now a new creation by God. God, the surprising God, will now embrace as his own all those who love justice and who become servants of the Lord. Even the foreigners “any who will keep the Sabbath and the covenant – all these will be gathered by God ‘to the Holy Mountain.’” Israel is now given a new and compelling vision of itself.

This image is pertinent to the Church of Des Moines. The changing face of this state and diocese, the influx of Hispanics and other immigrants, the consequences and cost of sexual abuse, the tension of economic hardship; all these raise fear, even despair for some, certainly the anxieties that always come with change. We find ourselves pondering the same question of faith the Israelites asked, is the Lord in all this or not? Is this of the Lord’s doing or not?

In order to assure the fulfillment of the new day, we need to abandon certain attachments which impede its coming – and impede the total activation of the Body of Christ. We need to leave behind our anger, our divisions, our hard and embittered feelings, our grudges.

Being Irish, I can tell you all about grudges. I can also tell you of the liberation, the exhilaration of being freed when I let grudges go. Equally liberating is experiencing the forgiveness and the dropping of grudges that others have held against me. When this happens, like no other moment, it is a new day. I encourage all of you to make this a new day! The heavenly Father sets the example for us as he continually frees us from sin and darkness in personal encounter in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

At St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York in April, the Holy Father expanded on this theme:

“For all of us, I think, one of the great disappointments which followed the Second Vatican Council, with its call to greater engagement in the Church's mission to the world, has been the experience of division between different groups, different generations, different members of the same religious family. We can only move forward if we turn our gaze to Christ!”

“In the light of faith, we will then discover the wisdom and strength needed to open ourselves to points of view which may not necessarily conform to our own ideas and assumptions. Thus, we can value the perspectives of others, be they younger or older than ourselves and ultimately hear “what the Spirit is saying to us and our Church” (cf RV 2:7; Pope Benedict XVI, homily, St Patrick's Cathedral, April 19 2008)

The one person who stands out in the Church's history accepting the present and ushering in a new day is Mary, Mother of Jesus. She is the patroness of the Diocese of Des Moines under the title “Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen.”

One can only imagine the fear and uncertainty that gripped her as it was announced: “you shall conceive and bear a son and give him the name, Jesus.” (Luke 1:31) With faith and hope Mary responded: “Let it be done to me as you say.” (Luke 1:38)

Mary gave birth to the Body of Christ. Today we constitute that Body of Christ. She is our Mother. She shows us the way. In this 97th year of the Des Moines Diocese we embrace the present and accept the call God extends in order to grow to the maturity of 100 years. We do so as a people of hope trusting in a future filled with love as we strive, to live together as the Body of Christ.

"Iglesia de Des Moines, Somos el Cuerpo de Cristo, Vivos en el Mundo de Hoy."

"Church of Des Moines, We are the Body of Christ, Alive in the World today."