

I would like to thank Msgr. Carroll and the parish community of Our Lady of the Magnificat for the graced opportunity to attend Mass on the Benjamin Parkway of Philadelphia celebrated by our Holy Father, Pope Francis, this past Sunday, September 27. Through the parish raffle I won two tickets and was able to attend with my very good friend and father-in-law, John Hughes.

As I shared the joy on Facebook of winning a ticket to the event, one person questioned me, “what do you think of his world view?” I was perplexed by this question, but it stayed in the back of my mind from days before the Mass to the beginning of the homily. As the Gospel was proclaimed, I was struck by the very challenging words of the Gospel Mark, 9:38-48 and the daunting task Pope Francis had to preach on these words.

In a very difficult Gospel passage, the Pope Francis challenged all of the pilgrims present not to be confined to the narrowness of a worldview view or to present or defend a certain political view, but rather challenged us to be instruments to bring others to Christ. In fact, the Holy Father emphasized how the narrowness of a specific worldview could blind us to the openness and abundance of God’s generosity. In Philadelphia, Pope Francis spoke,

“In the Gospel, John tells Jesus that the disciples had stopped someone from casting out evil spirits in the name of Jesus. Here is the surprise: Moses and Jesus both rebuke those closest to them for being so narrow! Would that all could be prophets of God’s word! Would that everyone could work miracles in the Lord’s name!...Our Father will not be outdone in generosity and he continues to scatter seeds...To raise doubts about the working of the Spirit, to give the impression that it cannot take place in those who are not “part of our group”, who are not “like us”, is a dangerous temptation. Not only does it block conversion to the faith; it is a perversion of faith...Faith opens a “window” to the presence and working of the Spirit. It shows us that, like happiness, holiness is always tied to little gestures...These little gestures are those we learn at home, in the family... They are little signs of tenderness, affection and compassion... Love is shown by little things, by attention to small daily signs which make us feel at home. Faith grows when it is lived and shaped by love... Would that all of us could be open to miracles of love to benefit our own families and all the families of the world, and thus overcome the scandal of a narrow, petty love, closed in on itself, impatient of others! I leave you with a question...at home do we shout at one another or do we speak with love and tenderness? This is a good way of measuring our love. That is why our families, our homes, are true domestic churches. They are the right place for faith to become life, and life to grow in faith.”

During this event, I was deeply awed by the way this man Pope Francis impacted this city of Philadelphia, not with his worldview, but by his words, touch and action. By his words, not to defend an agenda against political naysayers, but to welcome people home to the love of Christ. By his touch of the many children he personally lifted and kissed despite a security detail that I attempted to smother any attempt for people to come near him. And his actions which were continually filled with such energy, love and zeal despite keeping a schedule and fighting a time difference any person in the prime of their life would find difficult to keep. Even now, As I watch the coverage of the media attempting to politicize who Pope Francis did or did not speak or meet with, I now realize through his own words, he is not trying to make a political statement, but serving as the Vicar of Christ to continue to bring the timeless and saving message of Christ to all.

John Jakub