

## Archbishop Vigneron's Homily at Vigil of Pentecost 2017

Preaching on the Pastoral Letter, *Unleash the Gospel* and a new Coat of Arms  
From The Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron, Archbishop | Issued June 3, 2017

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I want to thank all of you who were members of who in any way participated in the Synod. If I could ask you please to stand so that we could give you *un aplauso*.

Tonight this vigil in the year of grace 2017, is very much about our synod, about our effort to unleash the Gospel. It's about expectation. Vigils are always about expectation. Sometimes they're very serious sorts of vigils. The vigil of a very concerned mother watching over a child in the sick room, with congestion in the chest... Is it going to be pneumonia or not? Watch. Wait. See. Do we have to go to the hospital? Sometimes a vigil is about parents waiting for a loved one to come home from a deployment, in expectation of the blessing. Sometimes it's the vigil of a very impatient parent waiting for that teenage son or daughter to come home, who is a little behind in curfew. Then of course, vigils are sometimes rather more light and joyful affairs. Think about the vigil that so many youngsters keep imagining that they can stay awake long enough to catch a glimpse of Santa Clause on Christmas Eve. They always fail of course, in that one.

But our vigil tonight is both serious and light, because we are here to solemnly promulgate and consecrate the work of our synod, celebrated on the Feast of Christ the King. And here to pray about the fruit of that synod. We have looked to this vigil as the occasion to publish the pastoral letter, which I hope in some way has gathered up the fruits of our synod. It's my witness to what I understood the Holy Spirit said to us. Not only in those days around the Feast of Christ the King, but through all the years and months that led up to that celebration. A sort of charter, to guide our life in the years ahead. And it is, as I said, not only about promulgating the fruit of the synod, but it's also about prayer, about being not only like Mary and the Apostles and the other disciples in the upper room, but actually being one with them and continuing that prayer. **We are expectantly on watch, praying ardently for the Holy Spirit to equip us for the work of unleashing the Gospel in this age, in this time, and in this place.**

We are admittedly only a small portion of the people of God in the Archdiocese, but we are a kind of a sacrament I would say of the whole local church, to both receive and embrace the fruit of Synod 16 and to ask the Holy Spirit for the gifts and the graces we need in order to respond to what we heard at the synod. This is not the time or place to even attempt a summary of the synod letter. I thought about that and figured you need to get home tonight, we don't need to do that. And actually, it's already been posted on the website, so you can look at it after Mass. Please don't take your cell phones out and begin now to read.

But what I would like to do is touch on a few of the central themes that are mentioned in the letter because they are really themes of the synod itself. And then we can make them themes for our prayer here in the sacred liturgy.

The first prayer I would ask all of us united in making, ask Our Lady to pray along with us, is to **pray for boldness**. Because, as the letter says, **the Synod's foundational conviction is that the Church in the Archdiocese of Detroit is resolved to obey the Holy Spirit and to be made by him a band of joyful missionary disciples**. This means that the archdiocese, following the call of Pope Francis, is resolved to undergo a missionary conversion. A change in our culture, such that every person at every level of the church, through personal encounters with Jesus Christ, embraces his or her identity as a son or daughter of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit is formed and sent forth as a joyful missionary disciple. That's what we heard at the synod. That's what I know the Holy Spirit wants from us. And yet, are we bold enough to do this, this new thing? Are we willing to be like the children of Israel, when Moses set before them all the Lord had ordered him. Will we be like the children when they were presented with God's law, saying, **"everything the Lord has said, we will do" (Ex 19:8)** Not half, sometimes I think, we're willing to bargain with God, on a generous day, I think we'd say we'd be willing to give you 60-40, but everything. That requires that all of us be bold. The boldness that led Peter to come out of the locked door, behind the locked door in the cenacle, and begin to proclaim that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. That the one they had been involved in seeing crucified had been raised up. That's what God asks of us, and we must pray, not only for ourselves, but for every Catholic in the archdiocese to be bold.

I would say we need to pray, we need to join with Our Lady and all the Apostles and the other disciples, and **pray for the gift of urgency**. We must feel and experience an urgency about unleashing the Gospel. The letter says that we heard at the synod that evangelizing aims to lead others to life-changing encounters with Jesus, with the result that He becomes the Lord of one's life. An encounter is a kind of person-centered form of contemplation and joining of one's presence. It's two persons being present with each other, with no other purpose than being present and sharing love. Whether our experiences of Jesus are sudden or more gradual, encountering Him is like meeting the person we're going to marry. We are overwhelmed by this encounter. You cannot imagine going forward in life without that person. Preaching and catechesis in our local Church must foster such encounters, especially by explaining our love relationship with Jesus as the purpose of the liturgy. Whenever possible, we need to invite people to respond to Jesus by surrendering their lives to Him and giving them concrete opportunities to do so. That's what the Spirit told us in the synod.

And so, when we think about St. John's Gospel, where Jesus got up on the last and greatest day of the feast and explained that anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Living rivers of water will flow from within Him who believes in me. That's why it's urgent, because it's the urgency of the heart of Jesus who wants living water to flow from the heart of every man and woman. So we must share and ask God to help us share, in the urgency, the zealous urgency, of the heart of Jesus Christ.

We must **pray that we are on fire with self-sacrificing love**. In the synod, we heard that there can be no bystanders in the work of unleashing the Gospel. I might put it this way: Nobody gets to ride the bench. There are no benchwarmers in this contest. **Christ calls every priest, deacon, religious and lay person in the archdiocese to embark upon the New Evangelization**. We have to get out of our comfort zone. We have to let ourselves be evangelized and changed. We have to pray for the fulfilment of what we heard prophesied by Joel: That the Lord will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, and that everyone will prophesy, the old, the young, that everyone will be speaking of God.

And so, this work that we all are entrusted with, this mission that's given to the whole people of God can only be accomplished with love, with self-sacrificing love, a love that is aflame because it's a love of Jesus Christ, a love offered in response to His Love, to Him who has first loved us, and if we love and we do love Christ, don't we, if we love Christ, how can we not seek to share that love with others? Because not only is He the best thing that's ever come into our lives, but it's what He wants, it's what He expects, to be loved by others.

We must tonight be united in **praying for faith**. The synod reminds us... In the synod we heard that the Church in the Archdiocese of Detroit is a new testament reality. It's not something you and I have constituted or gotten together to make up. In the synod letter it says the Book of Acts ends in chapter 28, with St. Paul under house arrest in Rome, still boldly preaching the Gospel. Luke ends the Book of Acts without actually finishing the story, because the story of the Church's mission continues in every age. We, you and I, the Church in the archdiocese, we are living what could be called the 29th chapter of the Book of Acts. We continue the same story. We don't simply imitate or find a model in the Book of Acts. It's our story, our reality.

And so, when we hear the prophesy of Ezekiel about the dry bones, and about how God can restore and wants to restore life to dry bones, we should think of ourselves, are there not many dry bones here in the archdiocese? Some of us are those dry bones, some parts of our lives, some aspirations and ideas and expectations that were once vivid, lively... They seem to have died, perhaps, they may even look like they're embalmed. But these dry bones can live. We know this by faith. God can take what's dead and make it alive. He did it before the sun rose on the first day of the week after Good Friday and he can do it here.

That's how we will continue the Book of Acts, by, in faith, calling on the Word of God to prophesy, as did Ezekiel, that the Spirit should come upon our dry bones and give them life.

We must **pray for hope**. Because **the New Evangelization is above all the work of the Holy Spirit. Not my work, not our work, not the work of the curia, not the work of parish evangelization coordinators principally, not the work of the priests or the deacons**. But it is the work of the Spirit in which we are blessed to collaborate. It is Jesus Christ, the letter says, who makes all things new. He himself is at work to renew this Church in the archdiocese. It is Jesus who is pouring out His Spirit anew, so that every member of the Church may be formed and sent forth as a joyful missionary disciple that the Gospel may be unleashed in southeast Michigan. Just as in the upper

room at Pentecost, today it is the Holy Spirit who transforms Christ's disciples from ordinary people into Spirit-filled evangelizers.

We do not despair of being able to accomplish this great work. We do it in great hope. Because as St. Paul reminded the Romans in the epistle we heard tonight: "The Spirit comes to our aid in our weakness" (Rom 8:26)

How can we make southeast Michigan part of the Kingdom of God? It can seem hopeless, but our hope is that it is the work of the Holy Spirit and he can do in us immeasurably more than we ask or imagine.

Let us then, especially as the synod said, pray for all of our parishes and families in particular, because it is in having our parishes and families filled with the Holy Spirit that the Gospel will be unleashed. Let us pray for one another, so that in 20 years, the archdiocese will be this joyful missionary band, saints united in Jesus, and Fr. Solanus won't be our only Blessed, but you and I might be on the list, canonized and beatified. There might be, I pray, I hope, so many saints and blessed there won't be enough days on the calendar for our memorials. Let us pray for one another that this be the case.

And I ask you please to **pray for me**. As I wrote in the letter, it falls to me as the principal shepherd of this local Church to lead and direct our community in answering the Lord's call to be about making disciples of all nations. In response to what I have heard the Holy Spirit saying to us in Synod 16, I pledge to you tonight that I will make Unleashing the Gospel according to the direction of Synod 16 the roadmap for the years remaining in my ministry as your bishop. I am firmly convinced that the graces bestowed upon the Church in Detroit through Synod 16 are a great spiritual treasure, riches beyond number which the Holy Spirit has poured out upon us for the monumental task that lies ahead. Unworthy though I know myself to be, with the help of God, I will be a true and faithful steward of these gifts that are the common property of us all for the work that has been entrusted to us all.

Come, Lord Jesus. Lord Jesus Christ, son of the living God, have mercy on us sinners.

Praised be Jesus Christ!