Dear friends, our prayers today are from the Mass of Our Lady of the Cenacle. Twenty years ago, I had the opportunity to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. We visited all the usual places in Galilee, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem, but one of those is especially pertinent today. The Cenacle, the upper room where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with the apostles. I remember thinking, this is amazing, this is the place where Christ gave the Eucharist to his Church, this is the place where he created them as his first priests.

And then it occurred to me, this is also the place of Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles, united in prayer with Mary, where they were anointed as missionaries and sent out into the world. Dear brothers and sisters, we celebrate this Mass of Our Lady of the Cenacle today, and we are reminded that even now, we are nourished by the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Even now, we too are anointed in the same Holy Spirit and sent out into the world as missionary disciples of Jesus. What began in that Cenacle, that Upper Room of Jerusalem, continues right here and now.

This also happens to be the last day of the liturgical year, and the Gospel gives us some sobering words to ponder. Jesus reminds us that we must be vigilant, we must be alert and prepared for the challenges that lie ahead. He doesn’t sugarcoat anything, but makes it clear: our lives as his disciples will be a trial. The world will challenge us. We might be ridiculed, because we choose to go a different way than some of our neighbors. We might even be persecuted, because we will not embrace the kingdom of sin that surrounds us. We will undoubtedly be tempted to take the easier way, to take the wide and narrow road that seems so easy and attractive, but that ultimately leads to death. Jesus never pulls any punches.

But the Book of Revelation gives us an equally important message. St. John shows us a beautiful vision of the Kingdom in its fulfillment, where the throne of God and the Lamb will be established. He tells us, “The servants of God will worship him. They will look upon his face... and they shall reign forever and ever.” The servants of God, those who heard his Gospel and followed him on earth, will look upon his beauty, his love, his majesty, and they shall reign with him forever. Again, they shall reign with him forever. My friends, this vision isn’t just poetry. This is the promise of our Lord to all those he calls his friends. This is the promise of eternal life that we talk about all the time, and it’s real, it’s waiting for us. This is the destiny that Jesus Christ prepared for all those he comes to in the Eucharist, and for all those who are filled with his Holy Spirit. Yes, our days here on earth may be touched with trials and tears, we may struggle to be faithful to our calling as disciples. But that struggle is sustained by hope, and the trials can end in glory.

This is why we are here. This is why we gather as disciples of Jesus, pondering the calling we have received. This is also why we embrace the call to be missionaries. Jesus offers this promise to all who will follow him, and it’s not something we can keep to ourselves. All are meant to receive this promise, all are invited to share in his glory. He challenges us to think beyond ourselves and to reach out to others, to give them the same lifeline that we have received, the same Gospel, the same grace, the same Christ.

I think you’d agree with me that the call to be a disciple is challenging enough all by itself. In this day and age, it isn’t always easy to be a follower of Christ. Perhaps it has always been so. The world around us has become so contrary to what we believe. It can be hard just to stand our ground against the assaults of our culture, of the world, of sin. But to be a missionary on top of that is even more daunting. Some might say it’s unreasonable, or even impossible to try to change minds and hearts in the world of today.
But, my friends, here we are in our own Upper Room, and we remember that all things are possible for those who love God. We are not alone. We are not disciples by ourselves, and we are not sent out by ourselves. He is with us always. “I will be with you always, even until the end of the age.” In our hunger he feeds us, not with earthly bread, but with his own body and blood. Through the Eucharist, he abides and makes his dwelling within us, he becomes closer to us than we are to ourselves. Sustained by the Eucharist, we can smile at the trials of the day and we look forward to the glory that has been prepared for us. And in our fear and hesitancy, he sends upon us the gift of his Spirit, the same Holy Spirit that transformed frightened, even cowardly, fishermen into fearless apostles. They went out from the Upper Room and immediately began to proclaim Jesus, unconcerned about what others would think, or what others might do. They were exhilarated by the power of the Spirit, and they knew they were not alone. Even when the journey became difficult, and they all suffered for their faith in Jesus, they persevered and they gave to others what they had received, the promise of eternal life in Christ.

Brothers and sisters, as we continue our convocation, our huddling together for a few more hours, we must remember the gifts we have received. Our Lord has called us to be with him – that’s the very meaning of the word “convocation.” And he sends us out to friends, family, co-workers, and perfect strangers, so that they too might know the hope that we have, hope founded on the love and mercy of Christ, hope for eternal glory, looking on the beautiful face of God. Let us beg our Lord to remain with us and to fill us with the gifts of his Spirit, so we might embrace the invitation he gives us, to be joyful, Spirit-filled, and compelling witnesses of Christ to everyone we meet. And may our Blessed Mother Mary, Our Lady of the Cenacle, support us and pray for us as we embrace the mission of Jesus, her Son.