

## 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time 2020 A

Every time the Gospel is proclaimed to us, we always ask ourselves, how can this Gospel connect with us in our daily lives? For this reason, it is good for us to reflect on our Gospel today in our here and now. We ask ourselves; what banquet is it that God is inviting us? What kind of gathering is it that He is summoning us to come?

We often hear this common remark from people when asked about their faith. “I am spiritual but not religious.” “I don’t have to go to church to pray.” “Why do I have to go to a priest to obtain forgiveness for sin?” “Why must I go to Mass, receive the Eucharist, in order to commune with God?” The answer is quite simple. We must do these things because Jesus himself has determined that this is what must be done. This is the clear instruction that God has put in His invitation for us to come to the banquet. If a person is to be a Christian as Jesus taught, one must do it in and through a community, a faith community. Yes, a person can pray by himself, he can walk in the woods and commune with his God, but he cannot be a Christian according to the directions of Jesus. To be a Christian as Jesus intended, one must commit himself or herself to a community of faith and take a share in responsibility for that community.

We can understand this by looking at the message of Jesus when He came here on earth. He announced through John the Baptist that there was a great need for a “conversion” in the society. No longer would faith be a private affair of something experienced just within families such as the Jewish Passover meal. Rather, an immense change should take place. Instead of just a family gathering for a meal, the whole community would gather for a greater meal – the Eucharist. This is the reason why when people pray, it should no longer begin with the pronoun “I”. Jesus said, “when you pray, say, “Our Father!” We must pray and celebrate together as one Body of Christ. We can also see this in the history of the Church. Beginning with twelve men, the Gospel of Christ was spread to every nook and cranny of the known world at that time. As they arrived in this or that city, they would draw together a group who would believe in the Good News that was being proclaimed. They would win some to the love of Christ, would teach them, baptize them, confirm them, teach them to love the Eucharist, and then, they, the bearers of the Good News would move on to other places. But they would leave behind a community, a gathering, a parish, a diocese, call it what you will. And it is in this gathering, in this community, in this parish or in this local church where we find the prescription for Christian living as defined by the Lord Himself. It is where we become a child of God when we were baptized. It is where we receive God’s forgiveness and healing in our lives. It is where we participate in its mission to serve and proclaim the Gospel in our daily lives. And most importantly, it is in the Church where we find the source and summit of our spiritual life – the Eucharist; where the Body and Blood of Jesus is celebrated and shared among us. As the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council puts it, “Christ is always present in the Church, especially in the liturgical celebration. He is present in the Sacrifice of the Mass . . . He is present in the sacraments . . . He is present in His word, since it is, He Himself, who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church . . . He is present, finally, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised “where two or three are gathered together for my sake, there I am in the midst of them.”

Avery Cardinal Dulles, a famous theologian, defined the Church as the following. First, it is an institution. It has a structured body, pastoral offices, bearing authority to direct and guide. As an institution, it is also made up of people with shortcomings and limitations, so imperfections are present. But despite of this, we know that the Holy Spirit is there present to guide it. Great empires and kingdoms have come and gone but the Church is still here despite of all the challenges it faced and is facing because God is the One who sustains it. Secondly, the Church is

a community. Guided by the spirit, it is a spiritual community united to God by grace and united to one another in Christ. We belong to the Body of Christ where God is our Head. Third, the Church is a sacrament especially in its prayer and worship. It must be a place where people connect with God and are inspired to become like Christ in their lives. The Church must always be a sign of God's grace and hope for the world. Fourth, it is a kerygma or a herald. It must proclaim and preach the Gospel and summon the people to faith in Christ Jesus. This would mean even proclaiming the truths that are hard for us to hear. This does not mean that the Church hate us or does not care for us. The Church must proclaim the truth, even the hard ones because that is who the Church is – a herald of the truth, the Gospel. Fifth, it is a servant. The Church must serve the unfortunate, help those who are struggling and fight for those who are oppressed and persecuted. This is the Church that we must be as a community. This is the Church that we must be as a Holy Family.

From the faith of those who have come before us and to all of us in our here and now, we must adhere to this invitation of God for us to be Church – in our institution, in our spiritual community, in our sacraments, and in our mission as a parish. We are a community of faith. We are the Church. Each of us is a building block of the Church, and an important building block if you may. Each of us has a share in the great responsibility of making our Church become who we really are. It is in this perspective that we have been called to this fantastic banquet. What is your personal response to this invitation? May our response be our active participation in the life and mission of our community, our Church, and yes, of our Holy Family. Amen.