

Homily for the Ladies of Charity installation Mass

Several years ago, while serving a parish in Herkimer County, I attended a testimonial dinner hosted by the local Catholic Charities. On that night the guest of honor was Sister Maureen Joyce, the head of Catholic Charities for the Albany diocese.

The Master of Ceremonies, who introduced Sister Maureen as a C.E.O, offered her lavish praise for her years of service to the marginalized of our communities. When it came time for her to speak, she thanked the local leader for his gracious words and then added the words, "Terry, I'd much rather be known as a Sister of Mercy", and not the chief executive of an agency".

In other words, she wanted to be identified as a servant of Christ. Christian charity will always prove necessary in a society badly in need of Christian witness.

Tonight it is my privilege to honor women who are "Ladies of Charity"

One of the activities of the Church is the exercise of charity. As disciples, you are instruments in the Lord's hands. You continue to heed the Lord's call to feed the hungry, care for the sick, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked and visit those in prison.

The Church cannot neglect the service of charity.

In his first encyclical, "Deus Caritas Est" (God is Love), the former Pontiff, Pope Benedict XVI offers a penetrating reflection on Christian service. He writes,

"Individuals who care for those in need must be professionally competent: they should be properly trained in what to do and how to do it and committed to continuing care. Yet, while professional competence is a primary, fundamental requirement, it is not of itself sufficient. We are dealing with human beings, and human beings need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern. Those who work for the Church's charitable organizations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity."

How often today do we hear despairing words of American workers, such as "It's only a job" or "I am only here to earn a paycheck every week" and "I count the days to my retirement". Clearly, there is no enthusiasm for the labor involved or an appreciation for fellow workers.

Such an attitude must not define the Ladies of Charity. A simple smile goes a long way in affirming our neighbors in need. Laughter, too, is important. All things in this life are passing.

At the end of Our Lord's Parable of the Last Judgment he assures those who faithfully ministered to those in need, they will receive a suitable reward. They will inherit the kingdom.

In closing, let me recall the words of a popular hymn.

"Where charity and Love prevail

There God is ever found.

Brought her together by Christ's love

By love are we thus bound"