

September 27, 2018 St. Augustine Cathedral 6:30 p.m.

Celebrating Workers of Mercy/St. Vincent de Paul, Priest (1581-1660)

(1 Cor.1:26-31; Mt. 5:1-12)

In the midst of such conflict, division, and animosity being publicly expressed among various groups of people, in so many different aspects of the political world and in the life of the Church, it is wonderful to be able to come together this evening to focus our prayers and attention on celebrating all those gathered here, and so many more who are unable to be here throughout our entire Diocese, who devote their time and energy to demonstrating their love for God by loving and serving the needs of their neighbor.

Jesus made it abundantly clear, in multiple places within His teachings, that of all God's commands, the two most important are to love God, with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength; and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves – and those two are to be seen and lived as one. Jesus taught us how to do that in very specific ways. The Beatitudes, which we just heard about in this evening's Gospel Reading, are a very clear explanation of what it means to live our lives according to that Greatest of all the Commandments: to be "poor in spirit, "the merciful, the clean of heart, those who hunger and thirst for justice" – those are the "attitudes" that lead us to eternal Life. And of course, as we all know, those "beatitudes" fly in the face of the "me-attitudes" that the culture in which we live encourages and fosters—living and caring for ourselves first, and most, of all.

But Jesus not only "taught" others the attitudes that they should have, and the actions that should flow from those attitudes; Jesus lived His own teachings in the ways He Himself cared for the poor, paid attention to those whom the rest of society ignored or even mistreated because of fear, spent time with the outcasts, embraced those with leprosy, and freed those who were held in bondage due to societal restrictions. As we might say today, Jesus not only talked the talk, but He walked the walk!

And the reason why Jesus taught the Beatitudes, and all the other particular aspects of His Sermon on the Mount, and most explicitly of all, the elements of what our Final Judgment will consist of as we find so clearly in Matthew 25, the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, is because of the basic principle and foundational Truth: namely, that each and every human being is made in the

image and likeness of God, and therefore, every person is owed great human dignity, and must be treated with love and respect.

So many of the saints understood that basic truth, and found the means to their own heroic holiness thru their love and service of those who were poor. The saint the Church honors today, St. Vincent de Paul, was one of those great saints – grew up in poverty, herding sheep; was a brilliant student and was ordained a priest at the age of 20; while on a trip on a ship, Turkish pirates captured the ship and he spent 4 years in slavery; was freed and became a parish priest who seemed at first to just want to have a normal, comfortable life. Then he had a kind of minor conversion. One day, after visiting a very poor family, he preached about this family's needs, and there was such a great outpouring of food and other material goods for this family, that they had to find other people to share it with. That was the beginning of his new-found works of charity. He began to organize groups in every parish – Confraternities of Charity: care for the poor, nurse the sick, find work for the unemployed. He worked for the renewal of his brother priests, helped to have better formation in the seminaries, instituted the Congregation of Priests of the Mission, and, along with St. Louise de Marillac, also founded the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity. He died on this date in 1660 as an old, but very happy, priest at the age of 80.

Along with the help of Blessed Frederick Ozanam, St. Vincent de Paul Societies were established in over 130 countries around the world, including here in our Diocese. St. Vincent de Paul is one of many Saints who have devoted their lives to the teachings and actions that Jesus taught and showed us as the way to live out the most important and the greatest of all God's commands.

St. Teresa of Calcutta in our own day and time (for most of us) was another of those powerful witnesses to the essential need of performing these works of charity and seeing Jesus in every human being, especially those that the rest of the world ignored, or were frightened by because of their serious physical or mental problems. "Mother" Teresa only saw the loving Face of Jesus.

My dear Friends in Christ, please listen once more to the words that St. Paul spoke in our First Reading this evening in his Letter to the Corinthians. "*Brothers and sisters, consider your own calling.*" So, let's do that; let's consider our own calling. Who we are!

First of all, we are brothers and sisters in Christ, as St. Paul reminds us often. Secondly, just as St. Paul reminded the Corinthians, all of us here are wonderful people, but I think we can all agree without insulting one another: we're not the smartest people according to the world's standards, nor are we the most powerful people in the world; and none of us belong to the high-falootin' levels of high society; we're not part of the "movers and shakers" of the world.

But much more important than any of that is who we ARE. We are those who have been "called" by God Himself into life, and, through our Baptism into Christ, have become members of the Body of Christ. As one of the Sunday Prefaces puts it so beautifully, we are "*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of Your own*".

And so, because of our "calling", our "job", so to speak, is to lead by example, and, in the process, as Paul put it, to "*shame the wise, defeat the strong, and reduce to nothing those who (see themselves as) something.*" And THAT is why he told them, and he reminds us, if we're going to boast about anyone or anything, we "*should boast in the Lord*"! So, as we see ourselves here this evening, we come from many different places around the Diocese, have lots of special talents, hold various jobs and professions of influence to one degree or another----but our "calling" is to use the gifts that God has given us to live the Beatitudes, and to practice the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, whose origin is found in that powerful parable of the Final Judgment in Matthew 25: to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to shelter the homeless, to clothe the naked, to comfort the sick, visit the imprisoned, and to give money to the poor. Why? Because, as Jesus Himself tells us, "*whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, that you do unto Me.*"

You are engaged in a wide variety of service to the poor. You are Workers of Charity and Mercy by working in food pantries, jail ministry, migrant ministry, providing funeral lunches; you go to visit the sick and homebound, help to educate those in need, provide housing assistance, utility assistance, and those with medical needs. You show kindness and patience to those with mental and physical disabilities, provide employment assistance. Many of you support the poor in far distant parts of the world thru sister parishes, and sister Dioceses. And that's only a partial list. But we gather this evening to give thanks to God for calling us to be His children, and giving us Jesus to help us to see that all people are God's sons and daughters, and therefore, brothers and sisters in Jesus. We

gather together this evening to “*boast in the Lord*” for the good works that He accomplishes thru us.

In Pope Francis’ most recent Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate (Rejoice and Be Glad)*, on the universal calling that we all have through our Baptism to be Holy People, he wrote this: “*We may think that we give glory to God only by our worship and prayer, or simply by following certain ethical norms. It is true that the primacy belongs to our relationship with God; but we cannot forget that the ultimate criterion on which our lives will be judged is what we have done for others.*” (#104)

He also quoted St. Thomas Aquinas who, when asked which of our actions did he consider the noblest, answered unhesitatingly that they are the works of mercy towards our neighbor. (#106)

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, we are here this evening not to pat ourselves on the back, because in truth, when we do all that we can to reach out in loving service to those in our lives who have material and spiritual needs, we are only doing what we, as true followers of Jesus, are supposed to do.

Rather than patting ourselves on the back, we are giving thanks to God, and asking God for the grace to continue being able to see all those around us thru the eyes of Jesus – to see our neighbors, and even total strangers, as those who are so worthy that He willingly gave His life for them – and for us. And so, we do indeed have great reasons to boast; and so, let us boast, boldly and loudly, in the Lord!

God bless you, now and always!