

August 11, 2019 19th Sunday of the Year 1:00 p.m.

St. Mary Parish, Niles

Diocesan Fiesta for the Resident and Migrant Hispanic Community

(Scripture Readings for 19th Sunday of the Year)

Introduction at beginning of Mass:

Good afternoon! Welcome to this Annual Diocesan Fiesta. My brother priests, and dear Sisters, and loving People. I'm so happy to be here with you on this beautiful day, to celebrate God's Loving Presence here with all of us. Jesus calls us "His little flock" in today's Gospel, and that is who we are---we are precious in God's sight, and He loves us unconditionally. But, unfortunately, we don't always live our lives so faithfully, or lovingly, as we know we should. And so, as we prepare to celebrate these Holy Mysteries, let us call to mind our sins and ask God's Mercy and Forgiveness.

Homily:

What a great joy it is to be celebrating Mass in this beautiful church, and united here by the love and friendship we have for one another! The greatest Joy that we celebrate here in this Mass is that of God's amazing Love for us, a Joy that will continue on in the Annual Diocesan Fiesta that will follow right after Mass, as a way to express gratitude to all of you for who you are, and what you do in the Name of Jesus and His Church. I look forward to this Fiesta every year, and I'm so happy to be here with you again this year for this annual, joyful event, even though I always get a little nervous when I try to celebrate Mass in my 2nd language, and especially as I try to preach this Homily also in Spanish. I know I'm only at about a "2nd-grade level", so please be patient with me.

I imagine we all get nervous about lots of different things, big and small, all the time. As I just said, maybe it's about things like getting nervous when any of us try to communicate clearly to others in our 2nd language, or now that we're getting close to "back to school" time for many, maybe some of the children are nervous about "vacation" time ending and the need to get back into a "school routine" beginning again.

We adults might be nervous about more “grown up” matters, like our financial concerns and being able to pay our bills; maybe we are worried about the well-being of our loved ones, or problems with our relationships, or our own personal health concerns. Given the political climate, and several recent acts of violence that seemed to be motivated out of hatred and racism, and worries about immigration “raids”, that may also make us pretty nervous, and cause us to worry.

But the Word of God today confronts all those worries head-on. We heard Jesus Himself tell us in the Gospel we just heard: *“Do not be afraid, little flock!”* Isn’t that a nice wonderful name for Jesus to call us? -----All of us are so precious to Jesus that He likens each of us to soft cuddly lambs that He loves and cares for, and which means that all of us are a part of His *“little flock”*. Jesus told us not to worry, because, as He said: *“your Father is pleased to give you the Kingdom”*.

That is another reason for us not to worry, because the God of the Universe, the all-powerful and all-knowing God, is *“our Father”*-----and since Jesus, Who is the only-begotten Son of the Father is the One telling us that His Father is also our Father, there really is nothing that we should fear, or worry about.

Besides Jesus telling us not to be afraid, God’s Word today also urges us to have trust---to have Faith; THAT is what will give us courage, and help us to deal with all those situations that might otherwise make us nervous. That doesn’t make all those problems, or worries, magically go away. We still have to deal with them. Jesus never promised that if we follow Him, life would be easy. Look at Jesus’ own life---He had all kinds of problems---HUGE problems like people refusing to believe in Him, or the religious authorities trying to arrest Him, or political leaders who became His enemies plotting to kill Him. So, if Jesus had problems, we can expect that we will have problems. And some of those problems will probably make us nervous, anxious, upset, and maybe even at times afraid.

But, let’s never forget: 1) we are People of Faith; 2) we know that God, our Father, has given us the Kingdom, and 3) we are trying to do our best to follow Jesus in the way we live our lives. And because of that, we have NOTHING to fear, at least not in “the big picture”, and not as far as our eternal salvation is concerned!

And there's one more thing that Jesus told us today that makes all the difference in the world, when He said: *"Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be"*. We can think of "treasure" in many different ways. Our treasure can be in our material possessions or how much money we make or want to have; our treasure can be found in the people whom we love with all our hearts---our spouses, parents, children, and family members; our treasure might lie in the dreams that we pursue, trying to use the gifts and talents God has given us to accomplish those dreams someday.

And all of those "treasures" are important. But Jesus wants us to treasure first and most of all what it is that God, our Father, wants to give us: the Gift of being a part of His Kingdom. Another way of saying that is that our greatest spiritual "treasure" is the Gift of our "Faith". Our Faith is what is most important----and we need to safeguard and protect that precious Gift more than anything else.

We heard what Faith means in today's 2nd Reading from the Letter to the Hebrews: *"Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen."*

Have you ever noticed that the most precious of all our "treasures" are not able to be seen? We know it when we see evidence of it, but we can't really see it. "Love" for example. You can't see "Love". We see the evidence of "love" all around us---in the faithfulness we practice with our spouses in Marriage; in the daily sacrifices we make for our family members all the time; in the fact that we would do anything it takes to protect those we love, even to sacrifice our own lives if that's what it takes. All of those acts are signs of Love.

It's the same with Faith. *"It's the realization of what is hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen."*

We might say: "I hope I can grow up and make a lot of money." Or "I hope that all my dreams will come true." That is one kind of hope. But the Hope that flows from the treasure of our Faith, gives us an assurance that God loves me unconditionally, and ultimately, our hope that one day we will be united with Christ forever in Heaven, is what motivates us to live our lives with Faith, trying as hard as we can to live our lives in God's ways.

And that's why it's so important that we "practice our Faith" each and every day. We do that by coming together each week to celebrate our Faith as God's People, and as we experience God's Love in His Word that we listen to and in the

Eucharist that we receive. We do that each and every day by praying---by knowing that God is Present with us, and guiding us in our lives, and trying to share the love of Jesus with all those in our lives in the way we express kindness, thoughtfulness, compassion, forgiveness, loving service and generosity of heart to others.

Here in this Mass, we experience the Joy of God's Presence with us, really and truly, in His Word, and in the Eucharist. After Mass, that Joy will flow over in the wonderful food we will share, and the games we can play here at the Annual Fiesta

That's the Joy of being one with God. And even more important that the Fiesta that will follow this Mass, when we come together for Mass, today, or anytime we do so, we are celebrating our "spiritual fiesta". This is where we can always rejoice and celebrate how much God loves us---more than we even realize. Our Faith is our true Treasure---and that's where our Hearts must be. And when we live our lives as People of Faith, then, no matter what problems or difficulties we encounter along our life's journey, we will keep hearing Jesus say to us: "*Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the Kingdom.*" God bless you, now and always!