

“Going to the End of the Line for the Glory of God”
Homily for the 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year “A”
Plaza of the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption
September 20, 2020

Introduction

Whenever I hear today’s Gospel reading, I recall the years that I served as pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe parish in Calexico. In the desert heat, I would jog early in the morning often along the border fence between the United States and Mexico. There I would see the exact scene Our Lord describes: men standing in the streets, waiting to be hired to work in fields so they could make a day’s wage.

The Eleventh Hour

Like the workers at the eleventh hour, these men were at the end of the line: the ones left out and ignored by society, the people barely able to survive. Often people like this would knock on the church door for help, because they knew that in a new and strange land, the Church *would* help them.

I remember one man, having arrived in this country without the proper documentation, who rang the doorbell and asked me, the parish priest, for a bus ticket to get to the place where he hoped to escape poverty and violence. So I gave him a ride to the bus station and bought him a ticket. I was aware that I was breaking the law, since it is against the law to provide transportation to an undocumented immigrant. But the highest law is love of God and love of neighbor, and that law has to take precedence over the human-made law of the state when government would ask us to turn our backs on God or our neighbor in need.

Now in San Francisco, all of us here are being put at the end of the line. No matter how rich or poor, no matter whether newly arrived or from families that have been here for many generations, it is our Catholic faith that unites us, and it is because of our Catholic faith that we are being put at the end of the line.

Months ago, we submitted a safety plan to the City including masks and social distancing, just like indoor retail stores did. The City said yes to indoor retail but we Catholics are still waiting to hear back. The City continues to place unrealistic and suffocating restrictions on our natural and constitutional right to worship. This willful discrimination is affecting us all. Yes, discrimination, because there is no other word for it. We ask: why can people shop at Nordstrom’s at 25% capacity but only one of you at a time is allowed to pray inside of this great Cathedral, your Cathedral? Is this equality? No, there is no reason for this new rule except a desire to put Catholics – to put *you* – at the back of the line.

For months I have pleaded with the City on your behalf, advocating for your need of the consolation of the Mass, and the consolation you derive from the practice of your faith and connection with your faith community. City Hall ignored us. City Hall ignored you. They didn’t deny it, but they simply ignored you. It has become clear to me that they just don’t care about you. To them you are nothing, to them you don’t matter. Let me repeat that: to City Hall, YOU DON’T MATTER.

One person at a time in this great Cathedral to pray? What an insult. This is a mockery. They are mocking you, and even worse, they are mocking God.

To City Hall, you don’t matter.

God's Ways and God's Thoughts

But maybe that itself doesn't matter. It doesn't matter because, to me, you DO matter. Yes, to me you do matter very much. I am here because you matter to me, and because I love you. We are here together because we love God, and love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. God created us to know, love and serve Him in this life, so we can be happy with Him forever; so, we know that when God is rejected by society, it only brings misery and despair.

Just look around our City. What has happened to our beloved City? San Francisco was once known as a place of great beauty and hospitality, a world-class City of great culture, the first home of the United Nations, whose very name conjured up images of "little cable cars [that] climb halfway to the stars." Now what images come to mind when people think of San Francisco? Look around the City and see: rampant homelessness and sprawling tent cities, drug dealing and shooting up in broad daylight, human feces on the streets. What has happened to our beloved City?

All of this is happening, and we Catholics are at the end of the line, because our City has abandoned God. Our blessed Lord is openly mocked to the gleeful grins of the cultural elites. The sacred symbol of the religious habit is blasphemed with glowing approval of those who profess mutual respect and tolerance for others who are different, while they openly discriminate against us.

This, my dear brothers and sister, is godlessness, sheer godlessness. What do we people of faith do when faced with sheer godlessness? We go to the back of the line. But please don't misunderstand me. I don't mean that we should accept injustice. We have been patiently putting up with unjust treatment long enough, and now it is time to come together to witness to our faith and to the primacy of God, and tell City Hall: No More!

What I mean by going to the back of the line is that all we do must be for God's glory, not our own. There is far too much seeking of self-glory going on nowadays, which has brought us to where we are now. No, as the prophet Isaiah tells us, we must act according to God's thoughts and God's ways, that are as high above our own as the heavens are above the earth; we must not use worldly means simply to fight to get our own way. In fighting for justice, we fight for the glory of God. And so I am calling on every Catholic in this City, and this country, to continue to exercise responsible citizenship, to abide by reasonable public health rules, and to continue to serve our community, despite the mockery to which we are being subject in so many different ways. This is God's way, and this is how I see Catholics serving Our Lord.

The workers at Catholic Charities have not abandoned the homeless living on the streets during this pandemic, even when others have. They don't do it for media attention or for accolades from the high and mighty, but they are there, quietly working themselves to exhaustion to provide food and transportation to the homeless in this time of pandemic. And there is so much good happening in our parishes as well, through the St. Vincent de Paul Society and so many other parish outreaches. Thank you, all you good and faithful servants, thank you dear priests, religious and the sacrificing lay faithful, for what you are doing to keep the love of Christ alive and visible in these distressing times.

This is what it means to go to the end of the line, to put oneself among the last, who will be first in God's Kingdom: to come here to witness to the primacy of God and that faith is essential, and then to return to your parishes to serve the poor.

Conclusion

But to persevere, we must be spiritually grounded. Three years ago I had the great grace to consecrate our Archdiocese to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. So that we may remain

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spiritually grounded, I wish to appeal to you all once again to *live the consecration*. Live the consecration by praying the rosary daily and as a family at least once a week. Live the consecration by spending at least one hour a week in Adoration of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Live the consecration by fasting on Fridays and by frequently availing yourselves of the sacrament of Penance.

Our spiritual grounding will elevate us to move in God's ways and think with God's thoughts. May God grant us this grace, for His glory and for the healing of our City, of our country, and of the entire world.