

Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

August 25, 2013

Homily for the Anglican Use Mass

of

St. Thomas More Catholic Parish

celebrated at

St. Joseph Catholic Church

Scranton, PA

Luke 13:22-30

Many of you know that my wife and I and four of our parishioners will participate next year in a pilgrimage to Rome. We will be accompanied by 55 others from the United States and Canada, as well as a few score from England, Wales, and Australia. What has been organized is an opportunity for Catholics from the world's three personal Ordinariates for former Anglicans to meet Pope Francis on the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter, February 22nd. We will meet our Holy Father to thank him for those brand new jurisdictions on three corners of the globe that allow for parishes like ours to be erected. And at Holy Communion we will share Christ's Body and Blood with people from all over the world that we would not otherwise have met, except for our common reconciliation to Holy Mother Church.

I thought of this precious gift of communion—with Christ and with our fellow Catholics—as I read the Old Testament lesson from Isaiah. In it he describes all the people of God from all over the world going up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice to God. He describes their different modes of transportation and indicates some people will have to be carried there, emphasizing our different states of life. But then God also says that some of them He will take for priests. That is, many from outside the fold will be brought in and some of them will offer up sacrifice at the altar of God right alongside the priests who had been there all along.

My roommate from college is here today. We met twenty-five years ago at James Madison University in Virginia and became quick friends because we shared so many similar experiences growing up, even though he had been raised in New York and I in Pennsylvania. A quarter century ago we could not have imagined that I, a Catholic priest, would one day baptize my daughter while Patrick stood in as her godfather, yet this is the gift that God bestows upon his children when together they embrace the Faith: The unimaginable becomes not only possible but real, and friends are bound more closely in Jesus than they could ever have bound themselves.

The ties that bind us together eternally are the gift, the fruit that flows from our embrace of the Faith. But our Gospel tells us what that consists of, what we must do if we are to enjoy eternal bliss together before the throne of Grace. We note first that Jesus, also, is going up to Jerusalem, but the meaning here is more than heaven. We know that to get to Easter Sunday, He must first pass through Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. Indeed, He is going to Jerusalem to suffer on our behalf, in our stead, so His journey indicates something about our own.

If we hope to enjoy the beatific vision with people from every race and nation, if our communion with our brothers on earth really is a preview of eternal communion in heaven, then what binds us will be the sacrifices we make on behalf of others so that they may possess what we already have. When we ask someone to be a godparent, we are looking for someone who has made such sacrifices already, while at the same time we have the expectation that they will be an example to our children by continuing to make sacrifices. Godparents understand that life is a preparation for the life to come, for that day when Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead, and the hearts of all will be revealed. Do we desire for those under our charge the weeping and gnashing of teeth that Jesus describes in today's Gospel? Or do we

desire the vision of communion that Isaiah presents in our first lesson and to which Jesus makes reference in the Gospel?

The sacrifices we make must be directed at a specific person, and here I am not talking about a husband or wife, mom or dad, child or godchild. The person for whom we sacrifice is Jesus Himself, Who has given us so much and asks that we manifest our love for Him as He manifested His love for us—by bearing our cross for the salvation of the world. The sacrifices we make benefit our neighbors, but they are for Jesus.

If the sacrifices we make are for our spouse, our parents, our offspring, then Jesus has become a sideshow. We are like the people Jesus condemns in today's Gospel, those who say, "We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets." For those people something other than Jesus was at the center of their lives. Their motivation for their good deeds is not made clear, but what we can know for certain is that they did not live to please God. If we are to be a good example to those we love, to those God has placed in our path, then we must be clear to them that they are not number one: our good deeds aren't for them, and we aren't trying to please them. Rather, we desire that every act of love is an act of worship: Every one of our actions is undertaken with Jesus at the center; everything is done because of our relationship with Him.

This relationship to Jesus is then what binds us to those who have little else in common with us. If we make something else the center, then the only people we can truly relate to are those who also have that as their center, whether it be family, ethnicity, occupation, or recreation. We limit ourselves to being in communion with a much smaller group of people. If on the other hand we place Jesus at the center, we can relate to over a billion people, most of whom do not share our culture, our language, or our history. When we go to Rome in February, we will see these people from all over the world; and though we have never before met them, we'll have more in common with them than we do with our countrymen, our family, and our friends who do not share the Faith.

This is how we make our lives a vision of heaven, a preview of the life to come. Because we know that in the life to come the entire communion of saints isn't going to be gathered around our family. We won't be gathered around our nation's flag, nor will our job or recreational pursuits stand atop the altar of God. We will be gathered around the Lamb who was slain and who lives, the judge of heaven and earth, the Lion of Judah. If we want to be for our neighbors the example they need us to be, if we want to be in communion with them for all eternity, then we can't do better than making number one in our lives Him who will be at the center forever.