

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year C



Together with Dcn. Steve and Mary, and Janet and Matt, I attended the Parish Renewal conference in Dallas, Texas. It was an amazing experience. There were about 150 priests, a bishop and about 450 laity in attendance including a few from Australia, Spain and England. Most of the attendees stayed at the Embassy Hotel in Grapevine, Dallas which was reserved for us at a discounted price. We were bused every day to St. Ann Catholic Church in Coppell for the conference which was about a 10-minute ride from the hotel.

This is an amazing parish with about 8,000 registered households, which is about 30,000 members. They have an amazing facility in about 40 acres. There is a large church; the daily mass chapel can hold at least 250 people; they have more than 100 ministries, and over 40 staff on the payroll. The Church budget per year is over 7million.

They do not have a school, but they have a large courtyard and many large rooms for ministry gatherings. They also have more than a thousand dedicated volunteers, and those volunteers were everywhere, greeting and welcoming us, from the moment we got off the bus in the parking lot drop-off location.

The St. Ann volunteers were wearing their blue “How can I help?” T-shirts with welcoming smiles on their faces. Even mothers/parents with infants/children in their arms were there greeting us. It was so heartwarming, and they made us feel welcomed and at home right away.

It was also very hot down there in Texas. The temperature was in the triple digits every day we were there.

Below is an email that was sent by a man who had gone to Florida to enjoy some warm weather to his wife who was to join him the next day. The email address was wrong, and it was sent to a widow who had just returned from the funeral of her husband:

To: My Loving Wife
From: Your Departed Husband
Subject: I've Arrived!

I've just arrived and have checked in. I see that everything has been prepared for your arrival tomorrow. Looking forward to seeing you then! Hope your journey is as uneventful as mine was.

(P.S. Sure is hot down here!)

The first day of the conference opened with Holy Mass presided over by the pastor of St. Ann Church, Fr. Edwin Leonard, at 10 a.m. He warmly welcomed everyone and talked of the importance of personal and parish renewals.

The keynote speaker of the day was Fr. James Mallon, the founder of Divine Renovation and the author of the book, *Divine Renovation: Bringing Your Parish from Maintenance to Mission*. I would encourage everyone to get this book and read it. Over a year ago we held a small group study and discussion on this book in our parish. Fr. Mallon reminded everyone of the Great Commission of Christ to “make disciples” and making this the priority in every parish. The Great Commission was not to “be” disciples but to go and “make” disciples. As a Church, we exist for this. Fr. Mallon spoke of the three keys to parish and personal renewal: the power of the Holy Spirit, the primacy of evangelization and the best of leadership.

I would like to focus on the second: the primacy of evangelization. That is our mission. The readings are all a wakeup call to prioritize what is truly important. They remind us of the insignificance of what we toil and die for in this world: material possessions.

The readings invite us to pay attention to what matters to God, the salvation of our souls and the souls of others. Do not worship material things. The word “worship” means “to ascribe value to.” What I ascribe value to is what I worship. How do I find out the things I give value to? Those are the things where I invest my time, talent, money, energy and emotions. That is what you worship. Idolatry in the Bible means putting anything or anyone above God.

The gospel parable of the rich man is a wakeup call to pay attention to what is truly important for the salvation of our souls. And that is to be immersed in our Mission to bring people to Christ.

The first reading is from the book of Ecclesiastes. Only twice in the three-year liturgical circle do we read from this book. Today is one of the two. It is a melancholic book that is sad and depressing. However, it captures true emotions.

It opens saying, “Vanity of vanities! . . . All things are vanity!” Often we use vanity to mean pride or self-love. But it has another meaning which is “transient, fleeting or passing.” All things in this world are transient, fleeting and passing. The only thing that is eternal is our soul. So pay attention to what is truly important. Let not possession possess us. St. Paul in the second reading of today reminds us to seek what is above. Let our mission to bring people to Christ possess us. Let us be immersed in what matters to God.