

Fifth Sunday of Easter, A – May 14, 2017 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
St. Paul’s Cathedral, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 1,000 words

This gospel is most often heard at funerals and it is a consoling one, indeed. But we do run the risk of thinking about it only in terms of the next life. Christ says, “in my Father’s house there are many dwelling places”: we err if we think that the Father’s house is only in heaven. In fact, if we are members of Christ’s Church, we are in the Father’s house even now. And there are many “dwelling places” in the Church; there is a place for each and every one, with a special task for each to fulfill in this life, in such a way that it should help us reach the eternal life and definitive dwelling place of heaven. Our readings today highlight some of the different roles or “dwelling places”, so to speak, that exist within the Church.

The first reading focuses on the ordained ministry, and in particular, on the diaconate. We are grateful for our two deacons here, and the many others that serve throughout our diocese. We are grateful for our transitional deacons Brad Jantz and Josh Altonji, who soon will be ordained to the priesthood. The seven men named in the first reading were ordained as the first deacons of the Church precisely so that they could focus on the service of the poor, freeing the apostles up for the tasks of prayer and preaching. It was not that other people in the Church did not also pray or even preach – or serve the poor. But a special focus on service of the poor was needed, and deacons occupied that place.

The second reading, then, highlights the “dwelling place” in the Church that is common to all of us: that of the common or baptismal priesthood. All who are baptized share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ.¹ Baptism makes us qualified to worship God in a way that pleases him.² And true worship involves sacrifices – which means there must be priests. Ministerial or ordained priests offer the sacrifice of Christ on the altar. Thus we speak of the “Holy Sacrifice” of the Mass, and the crucifix reminds us visually of what is taking place – albeit in a sacramental way – on the altar of sacrifice. Common priests – that is, every one of the baptized – offer different sacrifices to God. These include their prayers, works, joys, and sufferings. And God is pleased by these offerings, even using them to further his plan of salvation.

What sacrifices do you offer to God each day? [I preached before Lent](#) about the morning offering prayer and how important it is for setting that “tone” for each day, so to speak. We’re doing it right if we offer everything in each day to God – and, even more, if we do whatever we do because we know that we are offering it to God. As our patron St. Paul says, “whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him”.³ When we form that habit of seeing ourselves as priests who have something to offer as part of our daily worship of God, it changes the way we approach life. Even the most tedious or painful things can become part of our daily offering and so take on great meaning and value – both for ourselves and for others.⁴

¹ See Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, § 10: “Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity.”

² For a biblical example of worship of God that displeases him, see Leviticus 10.

³ Colossians 3:17.

⁴ See Catechism n. 2010 for the concept of meriting graces for others.

This morning/yesterday I celebrated a special Mass for the feast of Our Lady of Fatima. And I reminded all in my homily that one of the things Our Lady requested in her messages was that we do penance not only for ourselves but for all “poor sinners” – that phrase may sound antiquated or quaint to us now, but it’s very true: those who are living a sinful life are the ones who are truly impoverished because they are separated from God. In other words, the Blessed Mother reminded us that our prayers and sacrifices that we offer in a spirit of penance can win graces for others – graces of repentance, of conversion, of healing, and so forth. And this is another function of our common priesthood: not only to offer fitting daily worship to God, but to offer sacrifices for the sake of others as well.

I’ve been blessed to know people down through the years – even young people who had been properly instructed and really understood this concept – who made rather heroic sacrifices for the conversion of a friend or to obtain some other special grace. Do we do this now? It’s something for us to consider through the coming week. And as a way of focusing that consideration and taking all of this back to our participation in Holy Mass, I want to suggest that you bring all of these things with you to the offertory of each Mass you attend. Did you make a sacrifice for the conversion of a friend during the preceding week? Offer it to the Lord spiritually as the gifts are being brought forward at Mass. Did you accept some suffering or illness patiently and with resignation, for the sake of some desired good? Bring it to the offertory also. For it is only in the sacrifice of Christ that our own sacrifices take on true and lasting value. Our priesthood is from him, and in him it finds meaning.⁵

So I leave you with these thoughts about our common priesthood, and encourage you to download this homily from the web site if you need to come back to these ideas throughout the week. Through baptism we each have a dwelling place in the Church. For some of us that dwelling place has some particular characteristic, such as being an ordained priest or deacon. But for all, it is to offer sacrifices to God each day, so as to give him the worship he deserves and lead others to him as well. May Our Lady of Fatima help us to make a good and holy offering today and every day. Amen.

⁵ See Catechism, nn. 2008-2011.