

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time, A – November 5, 2017 – Very Rev. Bryan Jerabek, J.C.L.  
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, AL – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 950 words

*This is an edited version of the homily I gave at Sunday Masses.*

Our first reading this Sunday, from the prophet Malachi, is a rather dire warning to priests. The basic complaint – which we see repeated by various prophets in the Old Testament – was that the priests had become lax in their duty. They failed to pass on the knowledge of God through sure instruction. They no longer made the glory of God their sole aim. They became puffed up with the privilege of office and comfortable in having authority over others. And this problem surely did not go away after Malachi’s warning: even in today’s gospel, some hundreds of years later, we see Christ rebuking the Scribes and Pharisees for similar reasons. “Call no one on earth your father”, he says: this is one of those passages where he uses hyperbole to make a point. If he were being literal, then we should not even call our own dad our father! But the point he is making is that someone on earth can be called “father” only insofar as he points us to our true Father, God. It goes back to Malachi: the glory of God must be one’s sole aim. And Christ therefore says, “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted”.

The passing on of sure instruction is something that every priest must do – not his own ideas and theories, but what God has revealed and what his Church teaches. But doing so is most effective when there is a relationship between him and those whom he teaches. On the one hand, when he truly knows the people he can speak more fully to their needs and desires, as opposed to speaking in a generic way. And those who hear, then, will receive saving truth that applies to them, and be more disposed to receive it. St. Paul refers to this in today’s second reading, when he says, “we were determined to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our very selves as well, so dearly beloved had you become to us”. My first weekend here, about 16 months ago, I announced my intention to try to learn all of your names – and I have made some progress, though I have a ways to go! – and my hope that I could visit with you and bless your homes. I want to renew that offer today. Many of you have graciously taken me up on it, but there are still many more whom I need to get to know better.

There are other ways that a priest can more effectively know and serve his people also. One time-tested way is by having a parish council. Here at St. Paul’s it has been many years – at least a decade, I guess – since we have had such a council. A parish council is a consultative body that helps the pastor fulfill his mission. But what is the mission of a pastor? The Code of Canon Law outlines it quite beautifully. It says that the pastor, under the authority of the diocesan bishop, is to carry out the functions of teaching, sanctifying, and governing in his parish, also with the cooperation of other priests, deacons, and lay people. He is to make provision that the word of God is preached in its entirety to the whole parish (that means to those also who are not Catholic but live in the parish boundaries), especially by giving homilies on Sundays and on holy days of obligation. He is to foster works that respond to the needs of social justice and is to have particular care for the education of the young. He is to make the Holy Eucharist the center of the parish’s life. He is to bring the sacraments to the sick, promote a proper understanding and reception of the sacraments, and especially help people to know how to pray. The law says also that he is to know the people he serves, visiting his families, sharing in their lives, strengthening them, and also prudently correcting them when needed. He is to work to promote the family and the role of lay people in society and in the Church. And more. This

has just been a brief summary of all that the Church teaches us about what a pastor is to do.<sup>1</sup> Obviously, he cannot do all that alone; he needs a great deal of help!

I have decided, therefore, to convene a parish council once again here at St. Paul's, and am in the process of doing so. The Church does not require that each parish have one, but our bishop encourages it in our diocesan best practices, and I think that it is a good way forward for us. This council, in particular, will provide an appropriate forum for discussion and communication – something we greatly need. Till now, some concerns have only made their way to me through the gossip and rumor mill or in the form of anonymous complaints. We can do better, and I think this will be a positive step in the right direction. The council will be representative of the whole parish and not a mere echo chamber. I welcome the discussion that we will have!

May the Lord Jesus help us to do all that will bring him the greatest glory! And may our Blessed Mother, to whom our parish is consecrated in a special way so that she will present us to her Son, pray for us and show us the way forward in all that Christ wishes us to do for his Kingdom. The Cathedral is a wonderful parish and I am so grateful for the opportunity to serve you all! Thank you for your support and prayers.

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<sup>1</sup> See Code of Canon Law, canons 519-530.