

The Fifth Sunday of Lent – March 17-18, 2018

I would like to speak about two points this Sunday -- 1) the importance of our parish mission during these days and 2) Jesus's transformation of the meaning of the cross and suffering.

On the mirror in my bathroom I have a small sticker with the morning offering that was sent out the Confraternity of Christian Mothers.

The prayer is this:

O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer you my prayers, works, joys and sufferings of this day in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass offered throughout the world. – I offer them for the intentions of your Sacred Heart -- the salvation of souls, reparation for sin, the reunion of all Christians. I offer them for the intention of our bishop and all the Apostles of Prayer and in particular for those recommended by our Holy Father this month.

-- the particular intention of our Holy Father this month -- do you know what it is -- it is always on your monthly calendar for the parish. This month it just happens to be:

Formation in Spiritual Discernment:

That the Church may appreciate the urgency of formation in spiritual discernment, both on the personal and communitarian levels.

How wonderful can it be that this is what our parish mission these days is about – spiritual discernment – and that all of the world is praying for what we are doing these days in this parish mission!

At the heart of spiritual discernment is the search to discern and learn about the unique charism that God has given to each of us.

In the last year or two in our parish and in our diocese we offered a program titled “Called and Gifted” which was about discerning our charism or charisms.

One of the central things we learned about charism is that they are gift given to us by God, not for our sake but for the building up of the community.

One of the things that we pastors are especially called to do is to help people in our parishes to discover and to share their charisms for the good of the parish and community and we make many appeals for people to use and share their charisms or gifts.

But just as there is a time to share our charisms, there is truly a time when we also need to receive the charisms of others.

These days of our parish mission, we have the opportunity to receive the charisms of given by God to Mary Sharon Moore for the common good, and in these days, given by God for our good. Her ministry to us is a gift of God for us.

We have talked in recent Sundays about hearing the voice of God speaking to us through our conscience and other ways. Sad to remember, last week we heard how the Israelites, mocked God’s messengers to them, despised his warnings, and scoffed at his prophets.

Let us not be like them. Do not refuse the gift that God is offering to us.

On Thursday evening a friend, who is a college professor, called and spoke with me about 1 and ½ hours unloading on me all his worries for our country and questions about the breakdown of morality and unity that are being brought to him by his students.

It is easy to respond to problems in world by blaming certain other persons or leaders or groups for breakdowns in our government or

culture, but what about us as individuals, families or as a parish? Are we not called just as much to be a light for each other, for our community or for our world as any other?

Are we rising up to exercise the roles and charisms God has given to us for each other and our world? Catholic communities and all churches have a serious responsibility to be a light, give wisdom and be a witness of faith in the world. This Lenten season is about being renewed in all these gifts and responsibilities.

As we find it easy to criticize others, let us ask how the world will look at us and speak about us if we do not rise to the occasion and opportunity offered to us?

The fact is that many people of our parishes are gone these days from our parish for winter breaks, or because of sickness or need to help their families or others. We who are here are called step up and receive the gifts we being given these days of our parish mission and share these gifts with those not able to be present even if it calls for sacrifices from us.

Today's readings call us to be ready to follow Christ in making sacrifices for the sake of others and in these days to receive God's blessings for our parishes and become a blessing for others.

If fact, the specific focus of these days will be learning what role and charism and purpose has been given to us by God, and discern the purpose that God anointed us for in Baptism and Confirmation.

These gifts and anointings are not to be taken lightly. We will be accountable for the gifts that we have been given. We need to listen to the voice of the Lord these days and believe that he is truly showing his love to us and wants to bless us.

It is not Mary Sharon Moore herself that God wants us to believe in or listen to; it is God

Himself who always uses human and imperfect instruments, (namely, us) to speak and teach and to raise children up, etc. God has placed this world in our hands. We all have weaknesses and imperfections, as did all of the saints, yet God is pleased to work powerfully – very powerfully through each every one of us.

I pray that we all come and be blessed and bring others to the general sessions of our parish mission these next days. Let us come and be blessed. Let nothing else that is passing or less important keep us from fully preparing ourselves through prayer for all that God will be offering us, not just through Mary Sharon, but through the sharing that will go on between us and others these days.

I have seen already the Holy Spirit moving in so many persons and ways in the work of getting ready for this mission. We all have seen the Spirit moving in our parishes through so many charisms God has given to the members of our parishes that we might be able to support each other and to accomplish so many good things through the years.

Some of the charisms were in people that have now passed on to the next life or have moved on to other parishes, or are moving on to other parishes, but God is always sending us new persons and giving new charisms in their place and we continue to discover new charisms in our own life. It is amazing to see.

Let us not quench the Spirit as St. Paul says. Let the Holy Spirit move in each of us and let us come to the sessions of our mission and learn more about the Holy Spirit's gifts in us and in our parishes.

Let us open ourselves in these mission days and in this season of Lent to see the joy of the cross – the joy and life that comes from giving ourselves for the life and good of others.

In the Gospel, some Greeks come wanting to see Jesus. Jesus' answer sounds strange, but what he is saying is that if we want to really "see" Jesus, we must become like him. In the first reading we are promised a new covenant – God will show his will to us by writing it in our hearts as we follow Jesus.

On the cross, Christ gave his life for love of us. He does not say to us, "endure suffering", but says, "take o yourself the love that is the full gift of yourself." For Christ, the cross was not just the instrument of death, but the manifestation of his greatest love. We fear death, but today's readings say it is the beginning of life just as with the grain of wheat that must must be planted and die in order to bear fruit. Spiritual writer, Jeff Cavins says that our fear of death lies in the fact that we have not practiced for it. Practice dying to yourself everyday and see the fruitfulness. You will find yourself, Jesus says, in giving yourself. It is in the gift of oneself that there is true joy with the final outcome being that of finding life, as happened to Christ with the resurrection.

Let our hearts not be hardened but rather opened in faith to all that God is giving to us in this mission days and in this Lenten season.