

A Mission Church

“What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light...” Mt 10:27

Jesus is confronting the fears of the disciples, preparing them to face the trials and tribulations due to their announcing the Kingdom of God. It is going to mean hardships and rejection, persecution and death. But Jesus is positive in his encouragement. *“And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.” Mt 10:28.*

We began ***A Mission Church*** six months ago with a brief understanding of how the Church came to this country, this land before it was a country, through the efforts of the missionaries in California, Texas, and the Northwest; in Pennsylvania, Baltimore, and the New England area. No region of the country existed without Catholic persecution or intolerance. Yet, they came, Catholics in ships of every size and shape. They came, establishing even convents for African slave women in South Carolina, long before northern states would take up the cause.

They spoke languages as foreign to the other immigrants as they were to the Native Americans. In the darkness of uncertainty, they came, Catholics with little more than their faith. The witness they continue to provide for those who choose to know and honor history, is legendary, more than 500 years of faith. Long before we were one nation under God, we, the Church, were being seen as ***A Mission Church***. This was shown to us months ago, using as an example the missionary work of Blessed Junipero Serra while developing the California Missions.

Is it a perfect model? Hardly, but Jesus is the only perfect model to follow. In some instances force was used for the preaching, teaching, and sanctifying of the Native Americans. But in most cases, it was the force of the cross of Jesus Christ, the power of death

freely given for the sake of others. Salvation through Jesus Christ was not provided as an option. It was taught as a necessity for life after death.

These last two weeks of Lent, should make us mindful of what we are called to be about as followers of Jesus Christ. It is ours to now teach, to preach, and to make holy, not of our accord, but by the grace of Jesus Christ flooding us through the power of the Holy Spirit. We’ve been instructed in the basics of the truth of our faith. The fallacies pronounced by the ones opposed to the truth have been shown in weekly inserts.

There are probably others, such as the Sacrament of Marriage, Anointing of the Sick, and Commitment that we’ll develop after Easter. You’re invited to recommend any that may confront you through the misconceptions of others, many who have been falsely led to believe that Catholics are the devil incarnate. The people who heard the disciples were no different. That’s why The Church has martyrs for the faith even Today, as hard as it may seem.

We likely will not face death for our faith even as we read in Matthew’s Gospel, *“Behold, I am sending you like sheep among wolves...” (Mt 10:16)*, and we know that the power of the Word of God never diminishes. The whole of Matthew’s chapter 10 is about sending forth, persecution, encouragement, conditions for discipleship, and the rewards of accepting the call to teach, preach, and sanctify. **Read it!** It speaks of today as it did for Catholics through the history of this nation and the history of the universal Church.

A Mission Church is about being set apart from the world, believers not being drawn from God’s grace by any worldly ideologies or prescriptions that cannot yield the truth. In Jesus’ Last Supper Discourse we clearly hear what we must expect, if we are to be set apart for the work of God as ***A Mission Church***.

“If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would



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love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you." Jn 15:18-19.

Why is it that over 700 people will enter the Catholic Church in the Pittsburgh Diocese this year? How did they get to where they are? Yes, missionary work continues in the Church. The witnessing of the power of the cross, the teaching, preaching, and the making holy all continue, even now in a society filled with beliefs of self-satisfaction, or personal glorification, of an easy way to salvation. The easiest way, the only way, is the same way that has stirred within hearts and minds, a desire to step aside from the false gods found in materialism, secularism, individualism, and to hear the truth of the Word of God. It is what each believer is to herald. Truth. And that only comes from God.

"Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth." (Jn 17:17)

"I am the way, the truth, and the life." (Jn. 14:6)

The truth of the matter is, we cannot say we are incapable of doing the work of our Lord. In his life received when baptized, the grace necessary to continue as members of his Church, **A Mission Church**, was indeed given. To deny this would be to deny the Holy Spirit.

So where do we begin individually?

Perhaps it is in **prayer** where truth in the heart is revealed and our desire is refocused to God as the end of all ends. Perhaps it is a **metanoia**, that is a deep, profound change to view our entire being in light of God's fidelity to us and the ongoing call to conversion. Perhaps it is a re-evaluation of our actions as committed Christians, when we commit to speak in the light, to take on the mission of Jesus.

Refocused, we can prepare to make the changes in how we live, how we set our priorities, and how we show in our lives our desire to make known the kingdom. As **A Mission Church**, we study our environments and the people who fill them at home, in the community, at our workplace, where we re-create ourselves.

We dare to step out of ourselves as those early Catholics who came to this country did. We choose to follow Christ and don't turn back. Holy Week will soon be upon us. We are called not just to follow the

A MISSION CHURCH

...To Teach

The first place of learning the faith is the home where parents often teach by example. Children learn to fold their hands in prayer by witnessing their parents, and then through their parents, they learn the words of prayers often said in common with the whole Church, and in the private confines of a troubled spirit. It is the role of the Church, along with the parents, to instruct young minds and hearts in the practice of the faith, in lessons learned through the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ. And then, for all believers to go out to the whole world and do the same.

A MISSION CHURCH

...To Preach

Our preaching is showing the world the love of God through our lives united with that of Christ. Jesus set it (the plan and will of the Father) out for others. "Here's the way it is." So too must we do the same. We must know the truth as revealed through the word of God, Jesus Christ, found in scripture. We must allow the grace of God to be shown through our words and actions. It's not standing on a street corner with placards announcing the end of time, but of choosing the Lord's way in the face of opposition from those who would have us seek the short-term satisfaction found in the world's preaching of success.

A MISSION CHURCH

...To Sanctify

Only God is holy. Therefore, every person could use the disclaimer, "I'm not holy enough to help others." But that denies the gift of God sharing himself, all that he is, with us. Jesus never said we had to be perfect before we could do any good. No, he said, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Even in our weakness and incompleteness, we are being drawn to the perfect life of God. St. Paul writes in 2 Cor. 12:9 that, "...power is made perfect in weakness," meaning when we trust God even in our inabilities, we find the power that perfects his love in us and others. Holiness is made known to us in baptism where we come to share in the ministry of Jesus Christ as a priestly, prophetic people called to build God's kingdom. For us, that means sanctifying life, bringing all people into oneness with God. And, yes, we are gifted to do so from our baptismal life.

truth, but to teach and preach the truth and to allow others to know that truth which saves. To sanctify the world is to make known the one who saves and call others to the way, the truth, and the life. It has been the mission of the Church since Jesus. Now is the time to again live as **A Mission Church**.

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...To Be Sacrament

The Church is the Sacrament of Jesus Christ. We're told that in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Through simple logic, we can, therefore, deduct that each of us, joined in our one faith, are enabled to be sacrament in the world for one another. That is, as the Church is the outward sign of the

reality of Christ in the world, so too, individually as well as collectively, we are to be that same presence of Christ for the world to see. Our union with Christ and his Church is to herald a powerful message to the world, namely the Easter message echoed by his followers: "Christ has risen; indeed He lives."

A MISSION CHURCH

...To Be Eucharist

The secularism of the world would ultimately have us all looking the same. At the same time, the individualism also espoused by society leaves God as an option, since God may interfere with the growing identity of a person. To be Eucharist in the world is to live in the world, and to stand out from the world, a true individual whose identity is found in the giving of God-made-man, Jesus. The offering of ourselves for the sake of others is to show the incompleteness of a person unless God is present. Conformity to the world is no more an option for a person than is the lack of our true identity.

A MISSION CHURCH

...The Father's Will

Freedom is rarely seen as connected with "doing the will of the Father." Too often it is believed that "to do the will of God the Father" is to be submissive, and therefore, restricted. It is only when we see the fullness of what the Father desires of us that we can also see the freedom he desires for us. Once we learn how to free ourselves from the things of this world, we can announce to others the gift of an eternal life, free from the trappings of slavery found in twenty-first century culture. But why wait for that freedom? It is meant for us to accept and grow into now, just as Jesus did.

A MISSION CHURCH

...to Reconcile

To ask forgiveness, to offer forgiveness, to be the one to reconcile on behalf of another, these are not of our human nature. They belong to another whose perfection is necessary for such acts of love. In its imperfection, its humanness, the Church continues the work of the One perfected in love, Jesus Christ. And through his Church, he calls each of its members to the wholeness that heals love, removes sin, re-establishes broken relationships, and creates new beginnings. It is the mission of the Church to announce what it has experienced, that is, reconciliation of a Church meant to be perfect and a God whose perfection is love.