

30th Sunday B
Blessing of Renovated Portico and New Doors
Saint Mary Parish, Petersville
25 X 2015

I. Introduction

First, let me say what a joy it is to be with all of you this morning. As you know, I am visiting each parish in the Archdiocese for the celebration of Sunday Mass and in hopes of meeting as many parishioners as I can. The blessings of the new portico and doors here at St. Mary's is the perfect opportunity for me to visit with you, and also a perfect opportunity for me to join with you in thanking those who lead & guide your parish –until recently Deacon Tex who served as PLD, and now, Monsignor Rob Jaskot, who is your Administrator, as well as Father George Limmer, who has celebrated Mass at St. Mary's for over 9 years. Let offer all of you, dear parishioners, my warmest thanks for your deep faith and great generosity.

II. The Door of Mercy

- A. As you may know, our Holy Father Pope Francis has designed the coming year as an Extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy – a time of special graces when we give thanks to God whose love for us is so abundant and so unfailing, so forgiving and so powerful in transforming our lives. Just as in past Holy Years, Pope Francis will open the Holy Door at St. Peter's in Rome as a way of saying to the Church and to the whole world that God has opened the doors of his heart to us by sending us his Son and that in turn we should open the doors of our hearts to God the Father of mercies.**
- B. Although the Holy Year will not begin until December 8th, in my view, there is never an incorrect time to view the doors of every church, but especially the beautiful new portico and doors of this parish church, as a shelter amid the storms of life and as doors of mercy. Spend a few moments with me, if you would, reflecting on how today's Scriptures shed the beautiful light of God's truth and goodness on what we are about to do, namely, to bless the restored portico and the new doors that grace this church.**

III. The Prophet Jeremiah

A. Today's reading from the Prophet Jeremiah was addressed to the Jewish people during a most troubled period in their history.

Jeremiah began prophesying about 627 years before the birth of Christ.

The people of Israel had grown lax in their faith; in fact, many had abandoned it.

Efforts were made to turn things around, especially by King Josiah, but to no avail.

In 586 B.C. Jerusalem fell and many, if not most of God's people were exiled.

To them Jeremiah addressed a fervent call to repentance

coupled with God's promise to bring his people back home,

to gather them together again from the lands where they were scattered.

As we heard, this hope was offered to everyone without exception,

including the poor and the vulnerable, the lame and blind.

B. Perhaps we can see a parallel with our own times.

None of us has been sent into exile but, if we are honest, we have to admit

that many who belong to God's flock, to our beloved Church, have been scattered.

Israel experienced exile as a bitter hardship.

Today many don't realize that their alienation from the Church is a hardship.

Yet, trying to cope with the daily problems even the tragedies of life

without the nourishment of God's Word and Sacraments,

without the support of a loving community of faith – *is, in fact, a grave hardship.*

So many people today experience an inner exile –

they have removed themselves from God's love for which they were made.

In the end, life can become a hard and sometimes meaningless affair.

C. This church, with its porch and with its doors, offers them a warm welcome.

The porch offers shelter, not just from the elements of the weather,

but from the harsh elements of a relentlessly secular culture.

The doors open to the true homeland of the soul –

which was made for friendship with God, for worship and praise, for truth,

and for human solidarity, and for a spirit of loving service to those in need.

IV. The Letter to the Hebrews

A. Today's reading from the letter to the Hebrews in its turn gives us insight into Jesus.

The author tells us that in Jesus we have a high priest who is unlike other high priests.

Jesus is truly God's Son; from all eternity the Father says to him, "You are my son!"

Yet Jesus has become one of us; he shares our humanity

and so is able to sympathize with us in our weakness, in our problems and worries and to deal gently with us when we have gone astray.

B. Let us see this teaching in light of our everyday experience.

From time to time, we all experience difficult problems and moral struggles.

It might be a broken relationship, a bad habit, or even an addiction.

When we meet someone who can both sympathize with us and help us, then we would say of that person, "He or she opened the door for me!"

All of us need someone and at some time in our lives to open the door for us!

C. Doors, even very beautiful doors, can be perceived as entry ways or they can be perceived as barriers that lock and close off access.

So many people approach the doors of churches more as barriers than as a means of accessing the loving mercy of Jesus our great high priest.

It's not that we intend the church doors to be a barrier

but sadly that's how some, perhaps many, perceive them.

That is why Pope Francis calls you and me to be missionary disciples

who daily encounter Christ in prayer, who share deeply in his love and mercy, and who are ready, willing, and able to be his ambassadors

to family members, co-workers, friends.

The Pope is calling us to accompany them on their journey in life

and to walk with them first to the portico and then through doors, the doors of mercy!

V. The Gospel of Saint Mark

A. And this brings us to the Gospel reading from St. Mark

where Jesus cured a blind man named Bartimaeus.

Where does Jesus encounter Bartimaeus? He meets him "on the side of the road" where this poor man had been exiled and marginalized.

When he cried out to Jesus,

many in the crowd, including Jesus' disciples, told him to be quiet.

But Jesus asked his disciples to call Bartimaeus

and they did just that in these unforgettable words:

"Take courage, get up, Jesus is calling you!"

Dear friends, these are words that should always be in our hearts and on our lips":

"Take courage, get us, Jesus is calling you!"

B. We know and we believe that Jesus is the Good Shepherd

but he is also the gate, the entry way, the means of access, to the sheepfold.

In today's Gospel, Jesus himself is that gate, that entry way, that open door of love

for the blind man, Bartimaeus.

Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Bartimaeus answered, "Lord, I want to see" –

In restoring his physical sight Jesus also opened the eyes of this man's soul who then followed him as a disciple along the way.

How we need to ask Jesus to open the eyes of our hearts!

How we need to ask him to open the doors of mercy and discipleship for us, so that we in turn may lead others through doors to the altar of God.

VI. Conclusion

A. What a joy to celebrate this wonderful day with all you!

May Jesus be for us shelter amid the storms of life
and may he lead us one day through doors of eternity
to the house of his heavenly Father.

B. May God bless us and keep us always in his love.