

Bishop McClory Synod Celebration Homily February 6, 2022

Just two years ago in this very place so many of us were gathered as I experienced the joy of being ordained and installed as your Bishop. So, it's good to call our setting here home over these two years. As a seminarian one of the apostolates, I was privileged to participate in was out of evangelization I was a student in Rome at the time and the format was rather simple. In St. Peter square they gave us permission to have little speakers set up. Someone played the guitar, and on an amplified system, we were able to say some prayers. So, in a place like that, with so many pilgrims and so many tourists people get curious, and because there is something happening, they draw a little bit closer. And so as they would draw closer though I was not yet a priest I had my clerical attire on as a theologian at the time all we do is have a conversation with them. I'm a seminarian. Where are you from? What brings you to St. Peter's? Can I pray with you? Are you a Catholic? Are you a Christian? Have you been inside the church yet? Have any questions? Just a way to start a conversation.

And I have shared with some of you an encounter along the way, that was very moving for me. Because I encountered a young man, I remember his first name it's Robert which is my first name and he had been in Rome for a few days, and I said oh have you gone inside the basilica yet? And he said, oh no I can't go in there, I've done so many bad things, I've done so many bad things. He was from Miami and all I knew is that it involved drugs. And in coming to the site, you know you go to Rome like even if you're not a Christian St. Peter's is like Coliseum, Trevi Fountain, St. Peter's you know, like you just go there. But there was something inside of him that said I can't go in there because I'm not worthy. Wow. Today we hear in the Scriptures of those who have had a profound encounter with God and that experience leads them to a sense of their unworthiness, but it doesn't stop there because there is conversion, renewal, and mission. That their encounter with the Lord is something that in that beautiful mercy they experience from the Lord changes them so that the Lord uses them and uses us despite our limitations despite our sense of unworthiness despite a laundry list of reasons why we could say don't choose me. There's somebody better, smarter, more perfect, more able who can do this who can spread your message. Let's listen to what happens to the Prophet Isaiah today. Now Isaiah is given a vision that is phenomenal. He is able to have this window into the heavenly hosts, where they are saying those words that we'll say soon, Holy Holy Holy Lord of host the earth is filled with His glory. So it's like you suddenly get this window into something that's happening. Extraordinary. And so as this unfolds he experiences his own unworthiness. Then I said woe is me I am doomed for I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips yet my eyes have seen the King the Lord of hosts. It's this encounter with the awesomeness of God, and then a sense of his own need for mercy. But the Lord does not disappoint.

You've seen me using you know the coal the ember for the incense here today, and in this heavenly vision somehow this ember is taken by one of the seraphim and touches the lips of Isaiah. And in that very moment he is told see now that this has touched your lips, your wickedness is removed and your sin purged. And so this encounter with the Lord brings with it conversion and mercy. And so having experienced that beautiful gift, this amazing marking of his lips to be a prophet of the Lord we hear the voice of the Lord coming forth. Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? Having been renewed Isaiah says, here I am, send me. Here I am, send me. The Lord gives him that conversion the Lord gives him that mercy the Lord calls him, and he says yes. Now, I'm no Isaiah, but to be honest two and a half years

ago-ish when the nuncio called, and I called him back, first thing he said was and this is you know the Pope's representative, so I know something big is maybe happening here. And so the first question he asked is, are you alone? I said, yes. And then he said are you driving? And I said no. And then he said the Holy Father Pope Francis has appointed you the Bishop of Gary. And I tell you the first words out of my mouth I said, I am not worthy, but if the Holy Father is calling me to do this, I will say yes. And I'm so glad I said yes. Uhm what a joy but that first experience is not the exaltation it's, who me? Me really? I'm not worthy, but yes. But, yes. Now, St. Paul who is a phenomenal prophet. Extraordinary. He gives such a beautiful testimony to what the Lord has done but before that happens, he talks about how the Lord has appeared to different people and so on and he says last of all as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me. For I am the least of the apostles not fit to be called an apostle because I persecuted the Church of God. By the grace of God I am what I am and his grace to me has not been ineffective. So he says, I am the last one who one ever could have thought should have been given this gift. He just says I'm not worthy it says one born abnormally you know we hear later on that Paul has his thorn in the side, and there's a lot of speculation as to what that is that he was born abnormally. I mean you can read theories was he epileptic? Did he have a stutter? Did he like was he dealing with some sin I mean we don't really know. But he says look I know not only am I not up for this, I persecuted the Church. But then he gives witness to the mercy of Jesus. His grace to me has not been ineffective he says indeed I have toiled harder than all of them. Because he was a worker, but he said not I, but the grace of God that is within me. Therefore, whether it be I or they so we preach and so you believed. He says, I am not worthy but the Lord's using me. What a remarkable passage we have today in the Gospel. Jesus tells Peter to put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch. Seemingly there would be no catch of fish. Seemingly it wouldn't bear any results because they had been laboring. But he does it and what happens when they had done this it caught a great number of fish and Peter says, depart from me Lord for I am a sinful man. It's like in when he experiences the enormous overpowering miraculous working of Jesus he again says, look I'm not worthy, and Jesus says, oh no do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching men. You'll be hauling in men and women, bringing them into the love of God. I will use you and so powerful was this is that when they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him. They were on their way

We can come to the task of being a disciple of Jesus being a follower of his and perhaps give a list of objections as to whether he can use those as his missionaries. You know the classic I'm not good enough. I'm not smart enough. I don't have the right words. I don't know how to do this. I'm not worthy. I don't think I have what it takes. But Jesus overcomes all these answers and reminds us you know it's His work it's not ours. We're just cooperating with him, and the Lord uses us. His work, not ours. So, what or who does Paul go on to share? He shares Jesus as Lord. That this profound encounter with Jesus can be so life changing. Now today in First Corinthians this first part First Corinthians 15:1-11 is thought to be the oldest text in the New Testament. Probably written somewhere between 50 and 60 A.D., but its source even earlier than that. It's a credal statement, it's a statement of belief. And St. Paul says, I've passed on to you what was passed on to me. And it was largely believed that this formulation of it was likely settled possibly in about the year 35 to 40 A.D. It's like this is among the first things that the Christians said this is what it means to be a Christian, this is what we believe, listen to this passage here's what I'm passing on. What do we tell people? And Paul says, I handed onto what was of first importance of what I received not that it was his but he received this. Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, he was buried he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures he appeared to Cephas then to the twelve after that Christ appeared to more than 500

brothers at once most of whom are still living. The creed that we will say in this Mass had been expanded but its core is found right here. That Jesus is alive, that Jesus came and died to set us free for our sins he rose again. We have a fancy word for this called the kerygma, you know the core message of the Gospel.

St. Paul VI gave a beautiful document on evangelization in our time, and he says, there is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom, and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth the Son of God are not proclaimed. That we proclaim Jesus. St. John Paul II discovering Christ always and again and always more fully is the most wonderful adventure of our lives. And Pope Francis reminds us the primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him. To be a missionary is to be one who is sent. So the word "Mensio" is sent. So we don't send ourselves you know we are sent, another one sends us. For we who are ordained by virtue of our ordination, for all of us who are baptized by virtue of our baptism we are sent out. Jesus uses us and he wants to use us. And so rooted in that encounter with the Lord we have such a beautiful, wonderful, good news to share to the world, and we are not alone in this task. Pretty soon from this altar not the coal for the incense, but the very body and blood of our Lord Jesus will be offered to touch our lips. Of course we believe for serious sins for grave sins one seeks out the sacrament of reconciliation and certainly with baptism that mercy is extended. For lesser sins we do know that the reception of Holy Communion itself brings with it that renewal that forgiveness, and it certainly strengthens us. John of Damascus in fact made a direct parallel between the reception of the Eucharist and the coal. And he tells us, the bread and wine are not merely figures of the body and blood of Christ, but the deified body of the Lord itself. And let us apply our eyes and our lips and brows and partake of the divine coal in order that the fire of the longing that is in us with the additional heat derived from the coal may consume our sins and illumine our hearts that we may be inflamed by the participation in the divine fire. Wow! St. Ephraim similarly said, one who eats the Eucharist with faith eats with fire and spirit. The Holy Spirit is imparted to us. We are a eucharistic church and a eucharistic people, and the Lord will allow us to touch on our very lips Jesus himself, body and blood, soul and divinity. What a tremendous gift.

The young man who I met those years ago, I said, the Church is here for you, Jesus is here for you.

If you go in the church, there are priests there they have the sacrament of reconciliation available you can go. Don't stay back, don't feel like you have to have everything perfectly put together to walk in the door. We're here for people that none of us have everything together. But the Lord wants to forgive us and he wants to tell us there's a better way to live. That following his plan for our lives is a tremendous joy. And sadly, we still have folks who still believe that today you know I can't go in because I don't have my act together. I'm too bad a person, but this is the place where the mercy is extended. The other day you know some of you may have seen this I drove by a sign and it wasn't a Catholic Church but the sign said, the church for people who don't usually go to church. Well that's kind of interesting like that's an interesting marketing approach you know, but that we should be the church for people who don't usually go to church because when they encounter our Lord their lives can be changed and full of hope and joy and mercy.

Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch what a beautiful image. We have we got plenty of deep water here in Northwest Indiana, and we've got plenty of souls to be a part of catching for the Lord. It's not a membership drive you know. We're not like a bowling league that says remember the old

days when we had more teams you know like that's not what evangelization is about. It's about saying the love of the Lord Jesus is there for you and I'm not perfect, but the Lord has touched my heart, and I just want to share with you this love that I've experienced and hope that you can experience more. And rather than give a laundry list of reasons why it can't work and we can all give those, we can sit down and say every reason why something might not work in the field that the Lord sends before us, but today here at this Cathedral in this place at this time, let's say with Isaiah, Here I am, send me.