

Vincentian Heritage Week Opening Mass Homily

Sept. 30, 2022

Close your eyes and think about blessing. Think about being blessed in your own life. Think about what that means to you. What does that look like?

Perhaps it means health. Perhaps it means safety. Perhaps it means wealth or being cared for.

I came across a series of short YouTube videos and they're really about blessing, but maybe in a different way than some of us may think about it.

A very talented, professional woman, who left a very high-paced, high-powered career, changed her lifestyle. She embraced the Hawaiian spirituality of Malama. Malama means, in Hawaiian spirituality, care from God. Care of self, care of neighbor, and care of the earth. Really, what we heard just a moment ago in Matthew's Gospel, the Beatitudes of Jesus in a different form.

But this very courageous, talented woman who changed her lifestyle asked the question: Do I need all these things? Do I need to live at the pace I'm living at? I feel like I'm racing everywhere. Do I need all the possessions I have? I have a closet full of clothes, half of which I don't even wear. Do I have to fully, always live my life through technology? Through Twitter? Through Instagram? She said I'm not talking about using those tools, I'm talking about the dominance of them in my life. She said something was happening to me that I didn't like. It was as though I was running to grab something that, once I had it, it was totally dissatisfying. And there was something empty in my life when I had all those things.

At the heart of those videos that she makes is what she says: I'm trying to recapture unconditional love. Unconditional love. That's at the heart of the Beatitudes. And so much time in life, we lose that unconditional love that comes from God.

That's the message of the Scriptures today. That we can substitute possessions, we can substitute technology, we can substitute pace of life, and their false promises. The message of the Beatitudes today is really the call to go back to the unconditional love of Christ and to make that our foundation. To make that the source of our life. These other things are fine, but there is no substitute for the unconditional love of Christ.

That leads us to come to know our true selves when we peel away everything else. That leads us to go out to the margins of life, to those who live in poverty, to those who are lonely, and bring them back to the table of God. It leads us to cultivate a life of faith, and it leads us to cultivate a love and a care for the earth.

My sisters and brothers, that's really the gift of today, of being together. It's to hear God's word and be able to recommit ourselves to that unconditional love of God and Christ Jesus.

We remember today, in a special way, in Vincentian Heritage Week, the life of St. Vincent de Paul. Like the woman earlier in this story, he was a person who had lost his way. What became most important to him was financial gain, was security in a wealthy church, was advancing himself in society and the life of the Catholic Church of 17th century France.

But something happened to St. Vincent de Paul. While hearing the confession of a gravely ill poor person, he came to know the unconditional love of Jesus Christ, and it changed his life forever. And it changed the course of millions of people's lives.

That's really the message for you and for me. To allow the suffering of others, to allow our human compassion and our faith to come into our hearts and shape our lives. And not to insulate ourselves with possessions, or with technological tools, or with the pace of life. But to allow the unconditional love of Christ to touch our hearts and to move us forward.

At the end of his life, when he died, St. Vincent's body was brought through Paris for his funeral procession. And the people who lined the streets of Paris were the poor, the marginalized, and the locked out, who came to pay tribute to a man who brought the unconditional love of Jesus Christ into their lives.

Let's learn the lesson of that St. Vincent de Paul. Our possessions will not save us. Our technological tools won't save us. Our titles won't save us. Our bank accounts won't save us. What will save us is the faith we share, the relationships we form, and the service that we render to those in need. That is the Beatitudes, that is Malama, that is the Vincentian life of faith well-lived.