



MARY QUEEN OF PEACE PARISH

FEBRUARY 2019 HOMILY SERIES

“CHRIST’S VISIBLE CHURCH. CHRIST’S IMPERFECT INSTRUMENTS”

WEEK ONE: THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME (10 FEBRUARY 2019)
HOMILY OF FATHER AARON NORD

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Women and men are baptized here on Easter night. As water pours over them right here, the ancient promise is fulfilled, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit become their family. Holy, Holy, Holy.

Sixty-eight years ago, our pastor, Monsignor O’Toole, chose these words to stand above the church. In Latin: *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*. In English, *Holy, Holy, Holy*. Those words the Prophet Isaiah heard sung by burning Seraphim Angels above the throne of the Lord God: “Holy, Holy, Holy”.

The word “holy” means “set apart”, extraordinary, beyond the day-by-day. Our three readings show three ways God is holy.

- First, God is holy in his extraordinary glory, filling heaven and earth with life and beauty.
- Second, God is holy in his extraordinary power, filling sea and net and boat with fish after fish after fish.
- Third, God is holy in his extraordinary love, becoming human, dying “for our sins in accordance with the scriptures”, rising on the third day. God is holy, extraordinary, strange.

Yet, our three readings also show the holy, holy, holy God drawing near to us and drawing us near to him. First, God sends Isaiah. Second, the Lord calls a fisherman to help him catch men. Third, the risen Jesus appears to apostles. Jesus fulfills God’s ancient promise: “I will be your God, and you will be my people”, For Jesus Christ gave us—no, I can be more precise—for Jesus Christ made us the Church, Christ’s Body, by the water of baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In all three readings, God is holy. In all three readings, God draws near. And in all three readings, God’s instruments are imperfect. First, Isaiah says, “I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips.” Second, Paul says, “I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” Third, Peter says, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.”

Today at the 5:00 pm Mass, and tomorrow at 7:30 am and 9:00 am Masses, Deacon Tom and I begin a three part homily series called, “**Christ’s Visible Church, Christ’s Imperfect Instruments.**” There are many things which push people away from the Church. For you, maybe it is the sort of things that make the news, the crimes of some priests or the sins of some bishops. Those sins and crimes anger and disgust and frustrate me, too. For someone you know, maybe what pushes them away from the Church is something less well publicized, but important to them. Maybe it’s the priest who seemed only to care about money, or the annulment that was denied, or the teaching that they never understood, or the circle of Catholics that acted like jerks. Christ’s Church is certainly filled with imperfect instruments, and I am on that list.

Yet this Church is *Christ’s* Church, his visible, united Body, and if we distance ourselves from the Body, we distance ourselves from Christ. So Deacon Tom and I thought it would be worth talking about questions like, “What is the Church, really?” or “Why should I want to belong to it?” or “When something would pushes away me or push someone dear to me away, how do I respond with wise, courageous, humble action?” We thought questions like those would be worth your time, because Jesus means the Church to be a gift giving

us life, and Jesus means us to be his Church giving life to others. We all have a part in making the Church the beautiful gift Jesus intended. So, we hope you will join us for all three weeks of this series at the 5:00 pm Saturday, 7:30 am Sunday, and 9:00 am Sunday masses.

We've already learned that God is holy, that God draws near, and that God keeps his promise even through imperfect instruments, making us the Church, the Body united to Jesus Christ.

“Church” is not a word like “temple”, because a temple is a holy building, and the Church isn't really a building. “Church” is not a word like “hierarchy” or “clergy” or “leadership”, because hierarchy and clergy and leadership are parts of something bigger, and the Church is that something bigger. The Church is the Body, the assembly, the people of God united in and united to Jesus Christ.

This is the key point for today, so let's take it step by step.

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit sent the Son to make us their own people. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, founded the Church as a Body united to him. His apostles grew the Church, but the Church was more than the apostles. The apostles were just a part—an important part, a part established by God, a part helping the rest grown and keeping the rest united—but just a part of the Church. As the apostles died and went to heaven, the Church remained on earth. Christ Church, Christ body remained visible and united around the successors of the Apostles, the bishops with their priests and deacons. Like the apostles, bishops with their priests and deacons are only part of the Church—an important part, a part established by God, a part helping the rest grown and keeping the rest united—but just a part of the Church. The Church is more than the bishops with their priests and deacons. The Church is the Body of Christ, the people united to Jesus. The Church is still on earth today, visible and united, in the Catholic Church.

Here's why this matters to us. Through the Body of Christ, we live in him. United, Jesus gives us what we need to live truly and live eternally. Most importantly, Jesus gives us the Eucharist, himself truly present. Also importantly, Jesus gives us forgiveness and knowing we are forgiven. Also importantly, Jesus gives us the Gospel, wisdom, and unity in the truth. Also importantly, Jesus gives us reminders, graces, and challenges to get out of ourselves, loving and serving others as missionary disciples. Jesus gives us these gifts through our union with Jesus in his Body, the Church.

Do you believe it? Do we need it?

If so, three conclusions follow. First, if Christ gifted us the Church, then no other religion, no other denomination, no philosophy, no plan of life can replace his gift. Second, if Christ gifted us the Church, we want his gift to holy and beautiful. Third, if Christ gifted us the Church, we should pray for Christ's Church, especially in critical times, especially today. Hospitality ministers, would you please hand out the prayer cards? Our invitation is to pray this prayer for the Church now, and to pray this prayer for the Church with someone else this week.

***We stand before you, Holy Spirit, conscious of our sinfulness,
but aware that we gather in your name.
Come to us, remain with us, and enlighten our hearts.
Give us light and strength to know your will,
to make it our own, and to live it in our lives.
Guide us by your wisdom, support us by your power,
for you are God, sharing the glory of Father and Son.
You desire justice for all; enable us to uphold the rights of others;
do not allow us to be misled by ignorance or corrupted by fear or favor.
Unite us to yourself in the bond of love and keep us faithful to all that is true.***

**Grant to us and our leaders, that we may respond to this time
with courage and wisdom, that your Church may be holy.
We ask this of You who live and reign with the Father and the Son,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.**

Mary Queen of Peace: Pray for us.

St. Joseph: Pray for us.

St. Michael the Archangel: Pray for us.

All you holy men and women: Pray for us.

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