

Allentown Farewell Homily

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In Matthew 4, we see that John the Baptist's arrest and suffering are linked to the image of Jesus as the Suffering Servant described in Isaiah. John the Baptist prepares the Way of the Lord and his suffering and martyrdom prepare the way for Christ's own sacrificial death on the Cross.

To show his love for the Baptist, Jesus echoes his words: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

How easy it can be to get comfortable with and increasingly blind to our daily patterns of pride, envy, anger, lust, gluttony, sloth and greed.

But the Word of God is ever new, powerful and unpredictable. We have heard this phrase "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" many times before but when we open the horizons of our lives to the Holy Spirit, we hear it new every time.

Today, for instance, we hear this soul-stirring call to repentance at a unique moment in our marriage and family, our life as a priest, religious or deacon, our life as a young person trying to discern our future.

We hear it at a unique moment of the Church's history with Pope Francis inspiring all of us to touch the wounds of Christ in suffering humanity and reminding us that "families transform the world and history" with Christ's love and mercy.

And we hear it together as I am called from the fishing nets that we have cast together in Schuylkill, Carbon, Berks, Northampton and Lehigh Counties in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to the nets of Nassau and Suffolk Counties in New York and the rough surf of the Atlantic Ocean.

The Second Vatican Council stated that the Church is always in a state of reform and that reform moves most quickly when you and I hear anew at the deepest levels of our beings: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

St. Terese of Lisieux, Doctor of the Church, taught us that it is the little deed, the little act of thoughtfulness or charity, the little sacrifice, the little contradiction accepted with humility and the Cross of everyday carried with courage that sets the World on Fire with Christ's love.

Similarly, it is the small act of repentance, the small conversion that opens a new pathway of communication, mercy and understanding with a spouse, a son or daughter, co-worker or neighbor.

It could be a powerful moment in our experience of the Sacrament of Penance that leads us with St. Paul to a new life-lifting Road of Damascus experience with the Risen Jesus.

It is our small internal reforms that lead to the reform of the Church.

Pope Francis put it this way in *The Joy of the Gospel*: “Jesus can break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him and he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world.” (11)

Serving you, the holy People of God, *and you are holy*, has been my great joy. And we are all inspired by the holiness of all our young people present today. Please join me in thanking them for their witness and deep desire and determination to carry the mission of the Catholic Church into the future.

Thank you for the way you all have inspired, evangelized and formed me in Christ’s love since the moment I came here as a 48 year old Bishop in July of 2009.

It has been my great honor and privilege to lay down my life in service of you as your Bishop and Shepherd.

I have so many inspirational memories of our time together. Memories of your families, in the words of Pope Francis, “transforming the world and history” with Christ’s love and the mission of the Catholic Church on earth.

Memories of your parish families committed to being schools of prayer, holiness and the New Evangelization. Memories of the way you would tell me just how much you love your priests and just how much you are praying and sacrificing for vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

To bring it all down to daily family life, let me share one of my very favorite stories. During the World Meeting of Families with Pope Francis in Philadelphia, the Diocese of Allentown had a room reserved where our families could meet together, the type of family to family evangelization that is so characteristic of our Diocese of Allentown.

A big family walked into the room and sat at a table with their lunch. I sat down next to the youngest member of the family, a spirited sixth grade girl named Monica who was relishing an enormous bowl of mac and cheese and savoring every bite.

Suddenly, Monica let out an enormous burp. My first reaction was that I didn’t know that a sixth grade girl could burp that loudly! And Monica could care less that the 4th Bishop of Allentown was seated to her right. She was loving that mac and cheese!

We all laughed and then her wonderful mother Deanna put the moment in perspective the way only a mother can do. She said: “Bishop, Monica is the Exclamation Point of our family!”

I want to thank all of you for the way you are Exclamation Points of Christ’s love in your marriages, in your families, in the Church and in the World.

I have learned from my deceased parents Oliver and Marjorie and my entire extended family, the Bishop and priest mentors in my life like Bishop Robert Mulvey, Bishop Michael Saltarelli, Bishop Fran Malooly, Bishop Edward Cullen, Bishop William McNaughton, Bishop Joseph McFadden, Bishop William Murphy, Fr. James Halligan, my father in the priesthood, the priests of the Diocese of Allentown and the Diocese of Wilmington, and all of you, the holy People of God of the Diocese of Allentown, that when we make a deep sacrifice to follow the will of God and trust in the larger vision of the Church's mission, in the mysterious equations of God's grace, it all comes back in powerful and unexpected ways.

I have learned to trust that over and over again in my life just as all of you have in your lives and vocations.

Through the decision of our Holy Father Pope Francis, I am being sent to serve the People of God of the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

It is a painful sacrifice to leave you and I was overwhelmed by that sacrifice for a moment as I read this paragraph at the December 9th press conference in the Diocese of Rockville Centre: "I thank the priests and the entire People of God of the Diocese of Allentown, where I have had the great blessing of serving as bishop for the last seven and a half years. You will all always be in my heart, my memories, my prayers and my Masses as I remember our days of "holiness and mission" together."

I have always marveled at how Peter, James and John immediately dropped their fishing nets and followed Jesus to be fishers of men.

Fr. Simeon, the Carthusian biblical theologian, connects this scene to the Transfiguration when he writes: "At that moment the whole world surrounding them shone in a bath of glory – the water, the nets, the boat, their hands, their very own clothes and features – but only, they realized, because all of this was illuminated for them in their hearts by the Voice addressing them...following Jesus without conditions – is only for adventuresome and imaginative hearts, hearts that want to go beyond, to go higher, hearts that want to penetrate the divine reality of things."

Thank you all for having those adventurous "holiness and mission" hearts that want to do everything for the Glory of God.

Thank you all for having hearts that are as beautiful and as large as our global and missionary Catholic Church.

A nuestros hermanos y hermanas hispanos: Su presencia, su intimidad con el Padre, el Hijo y el Espíritu Santo, su deseo de ser discípulos misioneros que irradian la alegría del Evangelio, su tierna devoción a Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, la Estrella de la Evangelización, enriquece todas las dimensiones de la vida de la Iglesia y todas las dimensiones de la sociedad americana.

Así como San Juan Diego desplegó humildemente la bella imagen multicolor de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Así también nuestro Señor Jesucristo, Rey del Universo providencialmente ha desplegado en la Iglesia de los Estados Unidos de América, la rica tilma multicolor como

testimonio de nuestras familias hispanas, testimonio que, en palabras del Papa Francisco, "transforma el mundo y la historia".

Sepan cuánto todo el Pueblo de Dios en la Diócesis de Allentown aprecia y atesora ese testimonio y cuán fuertemente estamos con ustedes y junto a ustedes. ¡Adelante!

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF REMARKS IN SPANISH

To our Hispanic brothers and sisters: Your presence, your intimacy with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, your desire to be missionary disciples who radiate the joy of the Gospel, your tender devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Star of Evangelization, enriches every dimension of the Church's life and every dimension of American society.

Just as Saint Juan Diego humbly unfurled the beautiful multi-colored image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, so too has our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe providentially unfurled in the Church of the United States of America the rich multi-colored tilma of witness of our Hispanic families, a witness which, in the words of Pope Francis, "transforms the world and history".

Know how much the entire People of God in the Diocese of Allentown appreciates and treasures that witness and how strongly we stand with you and beside you. ¡Adelante!