

10th Wednesday of Ordinary Time 20th Anniversary Homily

Fr. Frank Schuster

Thank you for being here with me this evening. I am deeply moved that you would join me for mass tonight to celebrate my 20th anniversary as a priest. I know that a lot of you have really, really busy lives and it takes serious planning to be here in the middle of the week with everything going on. And, today is not even a holy day of obligation for goodness sake! So, thank you for your presence, prayers and support.

I could have chosen a different set of readings for the mass this evening but I felt the readings for today were in fact perfect as I reflect on twenty years of priestly ministry. For those who are curious, today is the tenth Wednesday of ordinary time. Hot dog, right? However, our first reading is from second Corinthians is really good. You see, one of the main issues Saint Paul addresses in this letter is his frustration with the people of Corinth for abandoning the Gospel that he preached to them so to follow charismatic carpetbaggers he sarcastically called “super-apostles”. This gives Saint Paul the opportunity to talk to them about where the authority to preach the Gospel comes from in his point of view. And so, this is what he says in our first reading today, it is a bit of a tongue twister so bear with me, he says, “Brothers and sisters: Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that of ourselves we are qualified to take credit for anything as coming from us; rather, our qualification comes from God, who has indeed qualified us as ministers of a new covenant.” In this little passage from our first reading today, Saint Paul is reminding the Corinthians that ministry is not about putting on a good show, or being an entertainer, and it certainly is not about taking credit for anything...as if the Gospel is coming from us. Rather, for ministry to be effective, that qualification must come from God. It must be objective. It must come from the Lord.

That little bit of wisdom is quite profound I think. And Jesus is essentially saying the same thing in our Gospel reading today when he says, “Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.” Scripture passages like these over the years have reminded me one thing loud and clear: ministry cannot be about me. It has to be about Jesus. My priesthood cannot come from me. It has to come from the Lord. What this means is: my best days as a priest are when I am close to Jesus. My worst days as a priest are when I am not.

Last Friday, the Archdiocese of Seattle welcomed our new coadjutor Archbishop Paul Etienne at the Cathedral. His homily essentially mirrored Saint Paul’s take on what it means to serve the Lord. What he essentially said was, it means to remain close to the Lord in everything we do. And, I appreciated his honesty when he pointed out that the worst days of the Church are when bishops, priests and deacons are not faithful to the Lord and fail to serve the People of God the way Jesus calls us to. We need to be held accountable for that. We need to do what is necessary as Church to restore the trust and it is going to be a long road. I appreciated that he would essentially say that in his first homily to us. He didn’t have to but I am glad he did. His words reminded me a little of what I tell the candidates for the diaconate in the Archdiocese as

their director. The Sacrament of Holy Orders is not a promotion. It is not a promotion. It simply cannot be seen that way. The Sacrament of Holy Orders, the ministerial priesthood, exists to serve the baptismal priesthood. Period. It is not a promotion. It is about washing feet, like the icon we chose for our altar here in our Church. The best days of the Church are when we all remember that. And I personally think this is also a good challenge and reminder for anyone who would call themselves a Christian.

At the end of the liturgy welcoming Archbishop Etienne, Archbishop Sartain gave a brilliant reflection on priesthood as he celebrates forty years this year. I embrace the fact that I am still a spring chicken. Archbishop Sartain reflected that the life of a priest is unique in that every day is different. You encounter and serve so many people from so many different life circumstances, ranging from every flavor of good times and bad. However, even though we encounter so many different people in our office who ask of us so many different things that are weighing heavy for them, every person who seeks out a priest is actually looking for the same thing. No matter what brought them in that day, what is really on their hearts are the words, "Sir, we want to see Jesus". Give me Jesus!

As I look back on all the people I have had the privilege to serve as a priest these past two decades, I have found Archbishop Sartain's words here to be true. I know in my heart that my best days as a priest were those time when I was able to somehow point someone to Jesus. I also know my worst days as a priest were when I failed to do so. I know in my heart that I still have much to learn and areas where I need to grow. And, you all help me grow. When you live your vocations well in the life of the Church, you point me to Jesus. You minister to me. I want you all to know that.

And so again, thank you for joining me tonight. I look at pictures of my ordination and I say to myself, who is that kid? I am grateful to all of you for your role in shaping who I am. I am grateful to our Lord for his invincible patience with me and for the privilege of serving the People of God as a Catholic priest. It really is a wonderful life. And so, in conclusion, what am I most grateful for right now, this second? I am very grateful that the liturgy now requires me to finish this homily, step away from the ambo, so that we can all focus on why we are really here. We are here my friends for the Eucharist so to become one with Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life.