

September 27, 2015 11:30 a.m. St. Augustine Cathedral

Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Readings for

Twenty Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Well, this has been quite a week, hasn't it?! Since we were together last Sunday, summer ended and fall has begun---the weather has been picture-perfect! And since Tuesday of this week, Pope Francis has been making his first Pastoral Visit here in the United States, first in Washington, D.C., then in New York City, and now in Philadelphia. And wherever he has gone, he's been received, as someone described it, like a "Rock Star"! I read somewhere that once the Pope's Visit was announced, the NFL Schedule actually had to be revised, and the article went on to say that only happened one other time---and that was to accommodate a Taylor Swift concert!

However, I'd like to think that rather than a rock star, Pope Francis is being seen for who he is: as the Shepherd of the Roman Catholic Church, as a Moral Leader of the World, and as one who proclaims the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Through all the major events at which Pope Francis has appeared---at the White House with the President; meeting with all 300 Bishops who came together from all over the United States; to the Canonization Mass of St. Junipero Serra; the powerful address to the Joint Session of Congress on Thursday, and then to the General Assembly of the United Nations on Friday, speaking to the world's most powerful leaders; but also to his visit to the homeless shelter in Washington, and the school children in Harlem speaking to some of the world's most vulnerable and least influential; and now---today---speaking to the more than 2 million people from around the world who are attending the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia---Through all those events, it feels like our country has been experiencing a kind of national spiritual retreat this week!

When we think about the incredibly full, demanding and high-powered schedule Pope Francis has been keeping, I simply don't know how he does it. I was thrilled to be with him in Washington for most of the events of that day---Midday Prayer with him and all the other Bishops at St. Matthew Cathedral (at which, by the way, I had the great honor to be one of the bishops chosen as a small representative group to personally greet the Holy Father---and I assured Pope Francis of the prayers, good wishes and faithfulness of all of you and all the

Faithful of the Diocese of Kalamazoo---[he always lights up when I say “Kal-a-ma-zoo”---he likes to hear our name!]), and then later on I got to concelebrate the Canonization Mass. And I have to tell you at the end of that day, I was exhausted! So how does he do it?! It has to be the supernatural grace of his office, the intercession of our Blessed Mother, and the strength of the Holy Spirit.

At every one of those events, Pope Francis has spoken like a true Pastor---one who cares about the well-being of every person in the world---and his topics have been about the most basic and essential aspects of faith and of society. He’s been talking about love of God and neighbor, about our obligation to be compassionate in caring for the poor---those no one else pays attention to---the marginalized and powerless members of the human family; he is speaking about our responsibility to protect and defend human life beginning with the unborn and including those who are sick and dying. He quoted St. John Paul II when he said that the true measure of the greatness of any society is how that society treats its most vulnerable and powerless members. He’s been speaking about the essential need for the protection and safeguarding of the right to religious freedom, and not just the protection of the right to worship---because the practice of our faith can never be restricted to our time of prayer and worship in a church, synagogue or mosque---but rather it should extend to the choices, decisions and actions of our everyday life in all that we do. And of course, he has been speaking about the essential importance of marriage and family life---the most basic and foundational cell of any society, and how we must protect and defend the family.

The Holy Father is pleading with our country and the world---with each of us---to see/know/understand what is important---what is of lasting value---what is most basic to the advancement of society and of the world; and at the same time to fight against and reject those forces or attitudes that work to undermine or destroy what is most basic and good for the world.

Pope Francis is a true blessing for us as Catholics----he really makes us proud!---but he’s a blessing as well for all people because he comes with no political or worldly agenda. He speaks only according to the “agenda” as revealed by God in His revealed Word and through His Word made Flesh---through Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

It’s at the core of the human heart where God has placed within us His very own Spirit. It was St. Augustine, our own diocesan patron, who helped us to understand that when he wrote so eloquently in his “Confessions”: “there is

something restless within the human heart that will only find rest when it rests in God.”

I think today’s Scripture Readings for this 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time are getting to that same basic point.

In today’s First Reading from the Book of Numbers, we heard how the Spirit of God that was strengthening and guiding Moses was being shared with 70 other leaders of the Israelite People who would help oversee the people. A bit of a conflict arose as to whether Eldad and Medad were actually included in that Gift of the Holy Spirit. Moses got somewhat annoyed and said (in effect): “Really, you want to argue about something like that? Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets. Would that the Lord might bestow His Spirit on them all!”

Well, guess what? In Jesus, and through our Baptism and Confirmation in Christ, that’s exactly what has happened to all of us. We have been given the Gift of the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. That’s why we refer to ourselves as “temples of the Holy Spirit”. That’s not just a nice, “churchy” phrase----that’s the spiritual reality of who we are. We may not always remember that, or act like we’re aware of that reality; but in fact, if we are baptized --- if we are confirmed----the Spirit of God dwells within us. And the reason God’s Spirit dwells within us is to guide us in our decision making so that we can make morally correct and lovingly just decisions in light of the choices that we are called on to make every day. The question is: Do we allow the Holy Spirit to help us---encourage us---strengthen us----guide us----inspire us----challenge us----comfort us? Or do we ignore Him completely?

In today’s Gospel passage, we see another similar situation. This time, it was one of Jesus’ closest disciples, John, who came to Jesus to complain that someone that wasn’t one of their company was driving out demons in Jesus’ Name so they tried to stop him, but he wouldn’t stop. Again, Jesus got a bit annoyed and said (in effect): “Really----with all the other problems we’re dealing with, you want to be upset about something like that? Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in My Name who can, at the same time, speak ill of Me....Whoever is not against us is for us.”

St. John got a very good lesson there, and there should be a lesson in there for us too. Isn’t our tendency to be more aligned with John’s? If someone doesn’t see things the way I see them, or have the same opinion as I do, or hold the same

political position as my party does, or believe the same things about God---well, they're simply wrong!

Jesus wants us to work more to find the common ground that unites us rather than to focus on the differences that divide us.

But there is a limit---a line that cannot be crossed. We heard Jesus teach very clearly that while we are to work for common ground, we have to draw the line if/when someone tries to lead another person into sin by giving bad example, by causing scandal, or by trying to persuade them to make wrong choices.

I think that's the basic message that Pope Francis has been trying to communicate. As members of the human family, we need to work together---to find the common ground that unites us---all the way from protecting our planet and safeguarding the environment, to defending the rights of the unborn and at the very least not losing sight of the basic and foundational principles of our country: that we are the land of the free and the home of the brave, and that we stand for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. At the same time, we must be vigilant and fight against those attitudes and various "isms", such as secularism, relativism, individualism and, of course, terrorism which are having such strong influences at all levels of our modern culture.

This evening, Pope Francis will fly back to Rome where he will finalize the plans and preparations for the Ordinary Synod on the Family---a meeting with the representatives of all the Bishops from around the world---to meet to discuss you--to discuss the importance of family life, and what we, the Church, can do to protect and defend that most basic of all of society's and the church's institutions. This important Synod will last for most of the month of October. Please continue to pray for Pope Francis and also pray that the Holy Spirit of God will guide the outcomes of this important consultation with the world's bishops.

And let us pray that through this celebration of the Eucharist and through the practice of our Faith, we will see/understand/know more clearly our true identity as God's People, as brothers and sisters united in the Body of Christ. To see and understand that we are Temples of the Holy Spirit. May that Holy Spirit of God unite us and encourage each of us to continue living our Faith with conviction, courage and Joy!

God bless you, now and always!