

**January 16, 2017. Mass upon Arrival for Pastoral Visit with Sisters  
Monday of Second Week in Ordinary Time**

Dear Sisters, Fr. Fabio and I are so happy to be here with you.

It took a lot to get here: three different air planes---several different cars---and a lot by foot. We left early this morning in the midst of ice and rain with temperature about 25 degrees Fahrenheit. We had to change our plans of coming last Thursday to come only today, four days later---and I thank you very much for adjusting all your plans and schedules to accommodate us.

We did all that because we really want to be here with you for these few days. Thank you so much for opening your Home. We, your brothers, are so happy to be joined with you, our dear Missionary Sisters of the Divine Spirit.

What better way to celebrate our happiness and joy than by doing what we are doing: celebrating the Presence of Jesus in this Holy Mass.

I think we are all tired at the end of a long day; I know I am! So I just want to share with you a few brief thoughts about these beautiful Scripture Readings.

In the First Reading, the Letter to the Hebrews gave us an insight into Jesus our Priest. I have special affection for this particular passage because I used this very quotation on my invitation for my Ordination as a priest more 45 years ago. What had touched me so deeply way back then was the insight that as a priest, I would be challenged to be patient and gentle with people in their sinfulness because I too am a sinner. And many times, as St. Paul said often about himself, I felt like I was the greatest sinner of all.

Jesus, the One without any stain of sin, came into our world primarily to save us from our sins, even though there is no One more patient and gentle with any one of us than Jesus is. Jesus is not only a model for priests to be gentle confessors and patient pastors, but He is a Model for all of us to be patient with one another.

The other point that really struck me in that Reading is that we are told that Jesus learned obedience through suffering. "Son though He was, He learned obedience through what He suffered." It goes on to say that "when He was made perfect, He became the source of salvation for all who obey Him."

Jesus, the Perfect One and Son of God grew even more perfect through obediently suffering for sinners---for all of us---even as He was totally innocent and without sin. That is really something powerful for all of us to ponder.

The Gospel shows us Jesus, once more being criticized, this time for not following the fasting rules. He calmly explained that just as people wouldn't fast at a big wedding party, so there is no need to fast while He is with us.

Just as you have shown us so much joy at our arrival to be here with you, with delicious food and good cheer, and now this Eucharistic Feast, so too we are called to be people filled with joy in Jesus' Presence.

As Pope Francis has told us many times, There is no room for gloomy faces for us who follow Jesus; there is no need for negativity, but rather we are people of Hope and Joy. Jesus is

the "new wine" that should stretch our old wine skins and make us all "new" and "alive" in His Love.

Dear Sisters, it is so good to be here with you. Thank you for your great example, for being such inspiration to Fr. Fabio and me. Thank you for sending some of your Sisters to share your charisms with us and the good People of the Diocese of Kalamazoo, and thank you for being our Sisters.

God bless you, now and always