

Reaching the Peripheries

Homily for Chrism Mass 2018 at St. Paul Cathedral, Yakima Washington

Isaiah 61:1-3a, 6a, 8b-9; Revelation 1:5-8; Luke 4:16-21

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Peace be with you! What is the core of our priestly identity? These last six years I have opened up for you in a variety of ways the passages from Isaiah 61 and Luke 4. This year I would like to focus for the first time on the second reading from the Book of Revelation. As you know, so much of our liturgy and even our liturgical texts stem from the Book of Revelation.

“Revelation” is an apt name. It comes from the wedding customs from the ancient Near East. Weddings, such as the wedding at Cana, were often multiday affairs. The bride would be veiled in layers of cloth and carried in procession to the tent or the home of the groom’s family in anticipation of their nuptial union. Slowly the bride would be “revealed” to the groom through the removal of the layers of festal clothing.

How does this relate to us as celibate priests who do not marry? I think through liturgy. Permit me to give a rather homely example. My first trip to Morelia in Michoacán, I ended up visiting Archbishop Alberto Inda-Suarez who a short time later became the first-ever Cardinal from Morelia. I had the privilege of concelebrating the ordination of transitional deacons there.

Yet as I looked at the seminarians who were serving the Mass, I saw peeking beneath their crisp black cassocks and nicely starched surplices their blue jeans and their shoes. I later learned that many of the seminarians came back from their morning pastoral work in outlying churches at the edge of Morelia in time to serve the Cathedral ordination liturgy with one of the world’s foremost organs, loads of incense – “bells and smells” as we say in English.

Similarly, this summer, beneath the backdrop of the dramatic Rattlesnake Mountain outside Mattawa, the seminarians organized a Mass with a dozen or so baptisms, confirmations, first communions and – yes – we even had a wedding. Edgar Quiroga who is our master of ceremony tonight, was master of ceremony at that open-air Cathedral outside Mattawa, with wedding-white banners, colorful cloth, festive decorations and – yes – their crisp black cassocks and nicely starched surplices.

I know I am most fully bishop when I preside at liturgy with priests, deacons, religious and laity. You are most fully who you are as priest when you preside with your people in your local parish. The sacraments – most especially the Eucharist – gives us a foretaste of heaven. It’s heaven touching earth. Paragraph 1000 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church notes that the Eucharist is a “foretaste” of the resurrection. It reveals what is to come.

Parallel to a wedding feast, the Eucharist unveils and reveals our human dignity. We taste and see the human dignity that is ours precisely because God takes on our humanity in the person

of Jesus. It is Jesus Christ whom we receive in all of his humanity and all of his divinity. It is Jesus – in the words of tonight’s reading from the Book of Revelation “...who is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his Blood, who has made us into a Kingdom, priests for his God and Father, to him be glory and power forever and ever.”

No wonder, then, that Pope Francis calls us to allow the fragrant oil of Chrism which we bless tonight to drip down to the edges and the “peripheries” of our world – not just to rural communities and urban parishes – but also the orchards, the fields and the migrant camps where we celebrate the Eucharist.

No wonder, as well, that Pope Francis in his encyclical “The Joy of the Gospel” dreams of a Church that lives the “missionary option” not limited by times and schedules and not concerned with her self-preservation but concerned with the spread of the good news.

No wonder, too, that in the following paragraph, Pope Francis talks about the absolute necessity of the parish – not as social club closed in on itself – but as a mission center that goes forth to animate the furthest reaches with the Gospel – realizing that if people don’t come to church then we go to them – out in the fields, out in the orchards, out into the homes and out into the businesses bearing the presence of Christ.

I am so grateful for the missionary zeal of parishioners in Cashmere, East Wenatchee, Bridgeport, Wenatchee, Prosser, Mattawa, Richland and Yakima – but to name just a few – who go out into the orchards and fields creating what Pope Francis terms as “the culture of encounter,” drawing together Spanish and English, Mexican and North American into a single united witness of love that comes from Jesus Christ. I am so grateful for this great Cathedral of St. Paul that witnesses so well to the beauty of liturgy and thus the God given dignity of each and every human person. I am so grateful for the way this Mother Church provides a spiritual home for everyone – rich and poor, documented and undocumented, English- and Spanish-speaking pointing to the heavenly liturgy – “the alpha and the omega” – who is Jesus Christ.

I am grateful to you – my brother priests – for seeing Jesus Christ as the core of your personhood and his priesthood as the center of your human identity. Thank you for the many ways you bear Christ. Thank you for the many ways you lead your people beyond themselves and their parishes into the world of mission. Thank you for creating islands of peace and reconciliation in society often polarized and divided. Thank you for uplifting the language of the church with its emphasis of the human dignity of each person in place of the social-media charged language of racism and divisiveness.

It’s wise to remember that this Chrism Mass is a Mass transferred from the first Mass of Holy Thursday to this day in accordance with the Roman Rite’s adaption that this Chrism Mass be at a time when priests can more conveniently gather to renew their priestly promises and concelebrate the Holy Eucharist together. But it is a Holy Thursday liturgy – a liturgy where we remember Christ’s institution of the Eucharist. May we live the intent of the scriptures from

the Book of Revelation. May the renewal of our promises reveal for ourselves and for those we serve in all we say and do our deepest love and deepest commitment to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Peace be with you!