

“Come, Follow Me!”

Homily for the Mass of Thanksgiving for Father Jesus Alatorre Silva in Tecomán, Colima, Mexico,
Friday, July 13 2018
Isaiah 49, 1-6; Matthew 9:9-13

Most Reverend Joseph J. Tyson, Bishop of Yakima

“Come follow me!” These are the words of Jesus to Matthew. These are also the words of Jesus to your son here in Tecomán – Jesus Alatorre. What might these words mean as we consider the priestly ordination of Jesus Alatorre?

"Come, follow me." On the most basic level, notes our Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, the phrase “Come, follow me,” “...is the Christian vocation which is born from the Lord's proposal of love and can only be fulfilled in our loving response. Jesus invites his disciples to give their lives completely, without calculation or personal interest, with unreserved trust in God. Saints accept this demanding invitation and set out with humble docility in the following of the Crucified and Risen Christ. Their perfection, in the logic of faith sometimes humanly incomprehensible consists in no longer putting themselves at the center but in choosing to go against the tide, living in line with the Gospel.” (Homily October 11, 2009)

What does this “logic of faith” look like? Building on the insights of Pope Emeritus Benedict, Pope Francis uplifts the famous painting titled “The Call of Matthew” by the Italian painter Caravaggio. In this painting Jesus – and not Matthew – holds pride of prominence in the painting. What the viewer may first notice is the hand of Christ pointing to Matthew with two others at the table imitating and confirming the call of St. Matthew.

Yet, Pope Francis notes this: “‘It is the gesture of Matthew that strikes me: he holds on to his money as if to say, ‘No, not me! No, this money is mine.’ Here, this is me, a sinner on whom the Lord has turned his gaze. And this is what I said when they asked me if I would accept my election as pontiff.” Then the pope whispers in Latin to Fr. Spadaro who is interviewing him for a number of Jesuit publications: “I am a sinner, but I trust in the infinite mercy and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ, and I accept in a spirit of penance.” (Interview with Fr. Antonio Spadaro, September 19, 2013)

Ultimately, this invitation to “Come, follow me!” means we come as we are. We come with our gifts and our talents. We come with our sins and our human limitations. Even more, as a missionary in North America, to respond to this invitation, “Come, follow me!” means we let go of the bag of things we most value and most treasure. We let go of our language. We let go of our culture. We let go of our family in Mexico. We let go of our friends. We let go of our history. Like St. Matthew, we let go of the things we most treasure.

We do so, not because we no longer value the friends, the family, the language or the culture of our homeland. We do so in order that our hands are open to receive new friends, new languages,

new cultures and a new family of faith. We let go of all we treasure in order to follow the great treasure who is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This is why I come here today. I come here today not simply to accompany my newest brother, Jesús Alatorre, as he offers up to God all that he values and treasures in all of you. But I come today to accompany all of you as you offer up one of your great treasures – Jesús Alatorre. I come as a pilgrim to this sacred place. I come to thank you for letting go of a young man whom you greatly value – a native son from Tecomán who has become a priest in service to the Diocese of Yakima.

In all of this, I hope that you can see that you are not losing a priest. You are sending a missionary. Three-fourths of the parishioners in the Diocese of Yakima have Mexican heritage. Most of our parishioners attend Mass in Spanish. As a diocesan bishop I am rather unique. I was baptized in the Cathedral where I now serve as bishop. Spanish has always been spoken in Central Washington going back to the days of the Second World War. When the United States sent an army of men to fight in Europe and the Pacific, Mexico sent an army of agricultural workers to put food on our tables. This pattern of immigration into the Yakima Valley has been going on my entire life. This is why even though I am the first local diocesan bishop in the Diocese of Yakima I am also a missionary. I have had to learn to master Spanish in order to be a missionary in the place of my birth.

“Come, follow me!” These words of Jesus mark each of you as missionaries too. “Come follow me,” is an invitation from Jesus for each and every one of us. How can each of us better follow Jesus right where we are? How can each of us better follow Jesus right where we live? How can each of us follow Jesus in a way that builds bridges and not walls? How can each of us follow Jesus in a way that shares “Good News” and not “Fake News?” How can each of us follow Jesus, as we support and tend to refugees on our own Mexican-American border? How can each of us follow Jesus through the political and diplomatic tensions of our day? How can each of us follow Jesus in the midst of violence that rocks our political systems be they here in Tecomán or the gun violence in the United States? How can each of us become missionaries of peace and tranquility right in our own families and right in our own villages and communities? How can each of us become missionaries encouraging each other to look up from the table, let go of the money bag, do away with the corruption, turn away from gun violence in order to see the finger of Jesus pointing at each of us personally beckoning us to hear the command: “Come, follow me!”

The answers start here – at the Eucharist. In a famous passage from one of St. Augustine’s famous homilies, he states *Estote quod videtis, et accipite quod estis. Estote quod videtis, et accipit quod estis* roughly translates as “Be what you see, and receive what you are.”

Patristic scholar Fr. William Harmless, S.J. suggests that St. Augustine had a deep fascination with the connection St. Paul made between the Body of Christ received in the Eucharist and the Body of Christ gathered at worship. At worship, we not only receive the Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in all of his humanity and all of his divinity but we also receive as brothers and sisters all those with whom we worship and pray.

No wonder that our own Catechism of the Catholic Church in paragraph 1396 specifically quotes St. Augustine: “If you are the body and members of Christ, then it is your sacrament that is placed on the table of the Lord: it is your sacrament that you receive. To that which you respond ‘Amen’ (‘Yes it is true!’) and by responding to it you assent to it.” This paragraph of the catechism concludes: “Be then a member of the Body of Christ that your *Amen* may be true.”

So, permit me to close by thanking each of you. Thank you for your desire to follow Jesus. Thank you for your desire to become who you are – the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ – not only for each other, but for those around you, those living in darkness, those struggling against violence, those desiring peace and tranquility, those desiring a life worthy of the God-given dignity in which every man and every woman is made. Thank you for desiring to feed your brothers and sisters in the United States with the Eucharist. Thank you for showing Jesús Alatorre how to follow Jesus during his many formative years here in Tecomán and pointing him towards feeding other with the Eucharist. Thank you for sending him to us as a missionary. Thank you for sending countless missionaries to the United States who often come in the form of immigrant and migrant workers. Thank you for your gift of faith that enriches and renews the Catholic Church in the United States. Thank you for responding to the call of Jesus, “Come, follow me!”