

Trinity Sunday A – Fr. Val Handwerker – “Going Away Homily”

June 11, 2017

Cathedral

all the Masses

Theme: Grateful for being called to be church with you

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Yes, John 3:16. **“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.”**

Three days ago Bishop Holley announced the priest assignment changes. Both Father Jose Cruz and I are being reassigned—Father Jose Cruz to St. Michael’s; and I, to St. Patrick’s Church downtown.

I want you to know: I am *very* grateful—to God and to you—for these seventeen years with you here in the Cathedral Parish. And the heart of what we do here; the center of this Cathedral campus—it’s here at the altar. I have been privileged to celebrate the Eucharist with you these past seventeen years.

Yes, everything we are and do flows from what we celebrate here. Oh, there are some who argue that what we do here is just “hocus pocus,” that is, “make believe,” in which nothing really happens. That expression, “hocus pocus,” comes from the Latin words which the priest used to say at the consecration of the bread: “Hoc est corpus meum,” that is, “This is my Body.” Let’s face it: there’s one possibility that nothing happens when we pray together. But we gather as church, joined together by faith—no matter how feeble it can be. And *I* believe, as you do, that when we *together* call upon the gift of the Holy Spirit, and we carry out what Jesus did at his Last Supper, the Risen Jesus is truly with us as we give thanks and praise. Oh, I believe, as you do, that we are truly fed and nourished with his very flesh and blood in Communion. Some might dismiss what we do as just “hocus pocus”—well-meaning, but nothing happens. Instead, *we* believe.

Oh, Friends, it has been a joy to celebrate the Eucharist with you, and your faith has strengthened mine. And the Eucharist is not just for us. From our baptismal consecration, and having feasted on Jesus’ body and blood, we are to go out and be the Body of Christ in midtown and beyond. If we’re authentic about it, that might

be the way some experience the presence of the Risen Christ in their lives. That's a lofty calling of ours!

Seventeen years ago, just before I celebrated the first Sunday Mass with you—well, I had my homily ready, but two hours before that first Mass I telephoned my sponsor, and broke down crying. I felt overcome with fear and felt inadequate for this calling. My sponsor, so I remember, reminded me about the care of God. And I stepped out in faith, trusting in His call, and depending also on your support.

I'm so thankful I did. Woven within these seventeen years I have been privileged to be with you in moments of great joy—key moments in your lives, such as Baptisms, First Communions, and weddings. I've also been with you during times of deep anguish and sadness in life—such as with sickness and death. Woven also in this tapestry of church life have been times of service, of education, of outreach—that we've done together. And also, there have been just those “ordinary times” in life. I look back and cherish how often I've experienced the Risen Jesus in all these special moments, too. All of these together, I never thought a priest's life could be so full.

Just as the Trinity—Father, Son and Spirit—are by nature a community, three and one...it's the same for us as church. As messy as it can be, we're called to be and live as church *together*. And over these seventeen years, I've developed a devotional practice at the start of every weekend, of remembering by name in prayer those from our parish who have died. Oh, there are those saints with a capital “S.” But we've known those saints in our midst who likewise fumbled with sin, but lived by grace. I believe they are still one with us, holding us up in prayer.

One of those “saints” from our past is Dixie Brown, who died in 2009. One day Dixie told me, “Father Val, I pray that the angels pick you up by your armpits and free you of your perfectionism!” Every weekend I make that prayer with Dixie and many other saints who have gone before us. You see, in our mix together as church, we all bring our frailties. And I'm well aware that you've had to put up with mine especially—my ego, mistakes, and sin. I ask for your pardon, as I pray those angels pick me up by the armpits!

Yes, sisters and brothers—and that is what you are to me, *sisters and brothers*: As long as I have memory, I shall cherish these seventeen years with you at the

“Mother Church.” And be assured: I shall continue to keep you in prayer the rest of my life, and I ask for your prayer for me.

We heard from St. Paul’s Letter a Trinitarian greeting that he must have used also at worship, as we do at the start of Mass: **“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”** I look out to all of you, and I can acknowledge with gratitude: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit *are* with you now.” May that grace, love and communion stay with you as you continue to craft this church, ever led by the Holy Spirit!