

5th Sunday of Easter

In this homily, I was hoping to preach about the 100th anniversary of the apparition of Our Lady of Fatima, the annual observance of Mothers' Day, and today's first reading, which gives the foundation for the permanent diaconate. But I received some news this week that I need to share with you right away. Bishop Johnston has appointed me to become the pastor of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception downtown, starting next month. The new priest coming to St. Anthony's is indeed a new priest, ordained two years ago: Father Jorge Andres Moreno, originally from Colombia. Father Andres has an excellent command of English, he is sincere, full of energy, and happy to serve you. I will have more words of gratitude to say over the next month, but I want you to know you are all dear to me, and I am grateful to you for embracing me as your pastor.

A bishop has many hard decisions to make, including the placement of his priests. A bishop provides administrative leadership, as the apostles did, and spiritual leadership. This weekend Bishop Johnston consecrates our diocese to Mary Immaculate, the Queen of Heaven and Earth. On May 13, 1917, exactly 100 years ago, the Virgin Mary appeared to three children aged 9, 8 and 6, in Fatima, Portugal. While praying the rosary, these children saw a vision of a woman about age 15 hovering above a tree, wearing a long white veil and holding a rosary. She reappeared to the children on the 13th of each month, and thousands of people began to go out with them. On October 13 that year nearly 100,000 people accompanied the children, and many of them claimed to see a vision of the sun spinning in the sky through rain clouds. From these events came devotions to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, prayers for the conversion of Russia, and increased recitation of the rosary. May 13 was the date that a would-be assassin shot Pope John Paul II in St. Peter's Square, and the pope attributed his survival to the intercession of Our Lady of Fatima.

This year the anniversary of the apparition coincides with the week when Mexico, Vietnam and the United States all celebrate Mothers' Day. Grateful as we are for our earthly mothers who sacrificed for us, we consecrate ourselves to Mary, our heavenly mother, no matter our country of origin.

Diverse countries of origin is one feature of this parish, as it was of the early church, as we hear in today's first reading. Some spoke Greek; some spoke Aramaic. Some of the widows went hungry because of poor communication. The Twelve appointed seven "reputable men, filled with the Spirit and with wisdom." They "prayed and laid hands on them." We regard them as the first deacons. You can see an excellent example of deacons here in the ministry of Tom Powell. He leads us in prayer, preaching, catechesis, and social outreach. Because this parish is large and diverse, we could use more deacons. For the first time in five years, our diocese is now accepting applications for the diaconate. I urge all of you to think about men in this community who could serve the church as a deacon, and ask them to apply now. Application information is in today's bulletin.

The church belongs to God. Mary watches over us. Bishops administer the church, and the Holy Spirit calls many others of us to specific vocations. Perhaps in this time of transition for our parish, we can all pray about the ways that God may be calling us to lead the church and serve others.

SUNDAY, MAY 14, 2017