

Fr Mike's homily from October 4, 2020

I imagine everyone here knows that the diocese of Rockville Centre filed for Chapter 11 Bankruptcy protection on Friday. I am not here to make a statement about that. I am here to preach the gospel in light of that. Our parish statement is on the website. The bankruptcy does not affect our day to day parish life. Your offerings stay here for our ministries – your gifts to the Catholic Ministries Appeal (CMA) stay in the diocese for ministry. As a matter of fact, I had held off on making my pledge to the CMA but when I heard that our donations go to ministries and not lawsuits, I made my pledge and paid it even after learning about the filing.

Today, October 4, is the 27th Sunday of the church year but it is also the feast of St Francis of Assisi. Because of social distancing we will not have a communal pet blessing this year. I encourage anyone who has a pet to go home and hug it, pet it and mark it with the sign of the cross asking God, through the intercession of St Francis to bless it.

But today, we can and should go deeper into the wonder of this simple saint. He was trying to figure out what his life was about and found himself in the church of San Damiano and looking up at the crucifix, he felt that Jesus on the cross was looking directly at him. He asked, "What do you want me to do?" And he heard the answer, "Francis, go and rebuild my church which, as you see, is falling down in ruins around you." He took that literally and began working on a church building, but later he and those who came to work with him began to understand that it was not the buildings but the community that needed to be rebuilt.

Yes, the church, the community, the Body of Christ, the hierarchy, the diocese needs to be rebuilt. Leaders in our church, priests and youth ministers have sexually abused minors. That is a horror and it is sin. Bishops, diocesan leaders, and pastors ignored it or looked the other way or hoped that a little bit of prayer would make it go away. That too is a sin and it didn't go away.

If we look at this in the context of today's gospel, we see that our church is the vineyard and those who abused and covered up are the workers Jesus is speaking about. He asks the question, "What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?" They answered him, "He will put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the proper times." I want to point something out here regarding the gospel: The plan to bring those retched people to a retched end does not come from Jesus – it comes from the people – it is a human response. Jesus' response is different.

The lawsuits and ultimately the need to file for chapter 11 bankruptcy protection are basically human responses – it is the human wage for sins of the past. It is about human justice – victims need to begin the healing process, and if compensation is part of the healing then it needs to be done in a just and loving manner. I pray that this process does bring healing and peace to the victims.

But this process also allows the church to continue – to rebuild and today as we celebrate St Francis of Assisi you and I are called to do the rebuilding. Going back to the gospel, we hear Jesus say, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." His response to those sins is not punishment it is about new life – rebirth – resurrection. Our entire faith is built on that – Jesus risen from the dead is the cornerstone of our life as church. But you and I are part of that rebuilding – maybe the sign out front should read, "Let us **re-build** the City of God."

The rebuilding process is going to take time. We have been speaking about rebirth since the moment we began gathering inside our church building in June. Jesus risen from the dead and Francis of Assisi have been part of the rebirth from the beginning. Since we never celebrated together during the Easter Season, we decided to light our Paschal Candle – the sign of Jesus risen – at every Sunday mass. We decided that this candle would be lit at Sunday celebrations through this weekend in the spirit of Francis who was called to rebuild the church.

So today we enter a new season. Some may see this new season as marred by the darkness of the chapter 11 filing by the diocese. But look behind me. We have our gifts of the Holy Spirit banners hanging in the church and they

will be here for the month of October. We are now in a season of the Holy Spirit. This weekend at our 10:00 mass we are celebrating the Easter sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist for one adult (Anastasia). And on the following three Saturdays and one Sunday in Spanish, we are celebrating Confirmation of our teens and some adults as well. These banners went up on Wednesday afternoon and on Thursday morning before mass I was speaking to a parishioner about them and he said, "There's a lot of hope there!" YES THERE IS! Because you and I have been anointed with the Holy Spirit in Baptism. I ask you all to pray particularly this month that we all allow the Spirit of Jesus to be stirred up in our hearts so that, as individuals and as a community we can experience real rebirth in Jesus Christ.

In the spirit of rebuilding and growing, let's go back to St Francis. He once said, "I have been all things unholy. If God can work through me, he can work through anyone." God can and will work through you and through me even though we are all flawed and are all sinners. Any 'rebuilding' of the Church today can only start with each of us taking a single step towards personal repentance and renewal in our own hearts – that first step, then another, and then one more...

Francis gave great advice for our lives as church: "Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible." But we don't just look to Francis, we look to St Paul who in today's second reading shows us how to live God's way of new life in our risen Lord:

"Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Yes, we face many, many challenges in our church and in our daily lives. But Jesus has already conquered them all. With faith in him, we will not only experience rebirth, but you and I will be part of that rebirth. Please continue to pray for every member of our church, that we will bring our burdens to the cross and build our lives on the cornerstone that is Jesus Risen from the dead.