

July 7, 2013

14th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Homily for the First Mass at Blessed John Paul II Parish in Cedar Springs, Michigan

Ask the Master to Send out Laborers

With joy and excitement, I greet each one of you gathered around the Altar on this very historic moment, namely celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for the first time on the grounds of the newly-established Blessed John Paul II Parish.

The words from the Gospel of Luke that we hear today, “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.” (Lk 10:2), have been quoted many times in various posters promoting vocations to the priesthood. Directors of vocations in different dioceses make reference to this passage in their talks and presentations to parishes and communities of faith with the hope of touching the lives of the young and letting them consider Jesus’ call to priesthood. Do these words of our Savior then only address those who are thinking about the priesthood? No, these words reach out to many audiences. With these words, Jesus calls all of us today to ask Him to send us laborers for the harvest. Why do I say that we are in the harvest season and Jesus is asking us to be the laborers of the field, gathering all the rich and blessed fruits of the land?

We are in the middle of the Year of Faith which was declared by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and has been followed up with our current Holy Father Pope Francis. It is a “summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the One Savior of the world” (Porta fidei no. 6). In other words, the Year of Faith is an opportunity for Catholics to experience a conversion – to turn back to Jesus and enter into a deeper relationship with him. The pope has described this conversion as opening the “door of faith” (see Acts 14:27). The “door of faith” is opened at one’s baptism, but during this year Catholics are called to open it again, walk through it and rediscover and renew their relationship with Christ and his Church. We are called to open the “door of faith” in our own soul and that of others. This is what I mean when I say we are called by the Lord to be the laborers of the harvest and its abundance.

More concretely, during this Year of Faith, you and I are called upon to open a new Blessed John Paul II Parish in Cedar Springs, Michigan. I did some research and found out that there are more than 3500 inhabitants in the city of Cedar Springs. Then there are also people in the surrounding areas. Since there has not been a Catholic Parish here in this city, we are indeed called to be laborers in the field of abundant harvest. We are called to preach the Good News and share our Catholic faith with others. We are called to bring people to the Lord by welcoming them into the Catholic Church. What an exciting time and what an awesome task! I invite all of you to be on board with me.

Beginning today, I invite you--children and adults, men and women, single or married--to be the laborers in this field of abundant harvest. Speak to your friends and co-workers about our Catholic faith. Invite them to our Eucharistic celebration as guests. Ask them to consider joining us. In short, be proud and live your faith—the faith that gives meaning and fulfillment to your life.

Forming and growing this parish will require the prayer, dedication and sacrifice of the residents here in Cedar Springs and the neighboring area as well. Talking about sacrifice, I would like in a particular way to acknowledge the people of St. Margaret. According to the Decree of establishment, the Blessed John Paul II Parish “shall include the mission church of St. Margaret in Harvard and thus assume administration of its temporal goods and related responsibilities for maintenance of its buildings and cemetery.” A week ago, I was present among you for the last Sunday Mass at such holy ground, and I recall quoting to you from the Gospel of John: “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.” (Jn 12:21). You are the grain of wheat that falls on the ground in order to give life to this new entity. As long as I am your pastor, this new parish should not and must not forget the great sacrifice of the pioneers in the establishment of this parish. I sincerely thank you for your warm welcome to me during my visit with you on May 18 shortly after my appointment to the newly-established John Paul II Parish was announced. Furthermore, thank you for assisting me with the informational meetings leading to today’s first Eucharistic celebration on these grounds.

My dear brothers and sisters, opening a parish is filled with challenges, but above all it is filled with excitement. I am counting on all of you to work with me. I am inviting you to be the laborers in the Lord's vineyard right here on this land. In the upcoming months, there will be excitement of renovation of this current facility for our worship. Then, whenever the time comes when the community grows, perhaps a new sanctuary might be in the plan. However, whenever we renovate or build a physical church or chapel, this "brick and mortar" journey also serves as a reminder for all of us. There is another important building needing to be built and renewed--our souls or our hearts. May our souls be the living temple of the Holy Spirit so that we all can be the effective laborers in the Lord's vineyard. Blessed John Paul II, who exercised the Petrine ministry with a tireless missionary spirit, pray for us. St. Margaret of Scotland, known for her charitable works, pray for us. Mary, Queen of the Apostles and Model of the Church, may all the people in this parish follow your example in following Christ. **Amen.**