

Mass of the Holy Spirit (Regis 2018)

St. John Francis Regis Chapel

First Reading: Judges 6:13-16a
Second Reading: Ephesians 6:10-18
Gospel: John 14:23-27

The *intended* theme of today's Liturgy was to be: How the Church in the current political climate might show our nation what a *more humane community* looks like. And then what happened? What happened? Pennsylvania happened. A Grand Jury happened. And a Report of more than 800 pages describing in devastating detail just how *inhumane* our Church actually can be happened. What has been revealed is a picture of clerical and episcopal hypocrisy which not only mirrors what goes on in our wider social and political life, but which *exceeds it* in horror and sheer ugliness. Jesus told his disciples in today's gospel (John 14:23-27) not to allow their hearts to be troubled, and not to be afraid, but how is this possible when we look honestly at both the Church and our nation?

Miraculously you and I are still here today, and we are celebrating the Mass of the Holy Spirit. The troubling question that stares all of us in the face, regardless of our religious commitments, is whether the Catholic community is capable of being a *credible* witness to a humane and life-giving way of life. If we are *not* willing to give up on this possibility, then we must first *name* and *face* the diabolical spirit currently present in both Church and nation, a spirit which contradicts everything that *God's* Spirit is about.

This destructive diabolical spirit has a legion of names, the first of which is *hypocrisy*. The magnitude of hypocrisy that we are witnessing in Church life and in our wider social-political life is breath-taking, and yet, ironically, hypocrisy is a reflection of our very humanity. In all the creation, it seems that only we human beings are capable of being hypocrites, of being duplicitous. My dog Basil, as I tell students, is incapable of hypocrisy- he is what he is, and he doesn't pretend to be something else- but I *am* capable of duplicitousness; I *can* pretend to be something other than I am. Our political world reeks of hypocrisy, and our Church is filled to the brim with it.

And what this hypocrisy gradually produces is the sheer *ugliness* that we now see all around us:

- the ugliness of children separated from their parents at the border in the name of national security;
- the ugliness of a winner-take-all approach in politics;
- the ugliness of racism raising its head under the name of nationalism;
- the ugliness of public discourse in which the very category of *rightness* has vanished so much that we seem to be living in a post-truth world, left with little more than alt-facts and cynical attempts to control the public narrative;
- the ugliness of priests who claim to image Christ but who cause crushing and lasting harm to children and others;

- the ugliness of bishops and chancery officials covering up abuse and feigning transparency, but working to protect the institution, the “patrimony” as they call it, at all costs;
- the ugliness of hierarchs and clergy pointing their crooked fingers at the LGBTQ community, making *them* into scapegoats and collateral damage for the sins of the clergy, as if what gay people want is just what clerical sex abusers want;
- the ugliness of the cocktail of abusive power, psychological manipulation, repressed desire, and a well-rehearsed moral duplicity among the clergy!

Right now, a great deal of life seems heavy with this ugliness. We are living in a time of *national and ecclesiastical deceit*, rooted mysteriously, I would suggest, in something bigger, something more powerful, something similar to what the writer of today’s epistle reading (Ephesians 6:12) calls “*the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers of this present darkness, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*”, which has infested both Church and nation.

What are we to do? How are we to live as *truth-seekers* in this kind of world? How are we to be *disciples of Jesus* in this mess? When it comes to the Church, radical structural reform, it seems to me, is absolutely necessary. As Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago said, the *whole* Church needs to confront attitudes of power, privilege and entitlement reinforced by structures that protect the clerical power-brokers from accountability. Reform there must be, but *what about us*

who have little power to effect anything? What about *us here today* who just want to get on with the university school year and to get on with life? Well, sorry, we *can't* just get on with life as if everything is normal. Regardless of whether we are Catholics or not, if we are *in any way* concerned about the future of the Catholic Church and her institutions like Regis University, then we should be asking ourselves how this Church can once again become a *humane and life-giving* community that has something to say to everyone.

I would suggest that there are two fundamental things that we need to do. First- and this applies to all of us- we need to be *absolutely* and *resolutely* committed to *the truth of things*. And for those of us who are religious, we need to turn to God and to plead with God to send us once again the *Spirit of truth*. We need to pray that God's Spirit of *truth* will burst into this world of ours like a *huge wrecking ball* and break to pieces all the dark places, all the lies, all the hypocrisy, and all the duplicity that ties into knots our Church, our nation, and dare I say it, even our own lives. And then we need to have enough courage to trust that after God's Spirit of *truth* has *dismantled* and *deconstructed* our structures, our institutions, and our lives that we will be able to put them back together again so that we can become a more humane and life-giving community?

If we are to ask this *redeeming deconstruction* of God's Spirit of truth, what will hold us as the deconstruction takes place? What will keep us together? What we are doing right now! We have come together to celebrate the Eucharist of Jesus,

and by this Eucharist to be *remade into the Church of God*. The Church, brothers and sisters, is not to be found only or primarily in chanceries and consistories and gatherings of bishops and ecclesiastical bureaucrats- although it is occasionally found there. The Church of God is to be found *here* and *wherever* God's people gather to be made into the Body of Jesus. "*We who are many,*" St. Paul wrote, "*become one body because we all participate in the one Bread*" (Corinthians 10:17).

The Eucharistic gathering has always been for Christians the concrete *place of truth*, the place where we can see and *taste* what life can be as God intended. As we eat the body of the Lord *broken for us* and drink his blood *poured out for us*, it is possible for us to *rediscover* that this is the place where we can learn how to live in love, to live in honesty, to live in mutual self-giving and concern for all, with hearts that are generous and compassionate and open. If we are to celebrate this Eucharist *with integrity*, then we need to be ready to pay the *cost* which the Eucharist calls for. This *Eucharistic cost* is that we commit ourselves *unreservedly* to the *wholeness*, the *flourishing* and the *salvation of one another* and of all people. The Eucharist is the criterion that we should be using to evaluate what needs to be changed so that we can once again become a genuinely humane and life-giving community. To allow the Eucharist to *judge* us means that we must be ready to say "*no*" at all levels of Church life to the abusive use of power, to coercive relationships of all kinds, and to practices and customs that make pastors and bishops into little princes and tin-pot dictators.

To commit ourselves unreservedly to the *truth of things*, to call on God's Spirit of truth to *dismantle* what needs to be dismantled, and to live our lives *out of* the Eucharistic celebration- this is what we have left. And what we have left is *what Church has always been about*. If we can rediscover and relearn this, then, I believe, we *can* become a *more humane* community *in and for* the world. We can *live in truth*, and we can *live for the sake of the flourishing of all life*. If we do this, then we *will* have something to say to this nation.