

Lenten Message

By Bishop Richard G. Lennon

Be not afraid for God is among the faithful

So often in the Bible the message "Be Not Afraid" or "Do not be afraid" or "Do Not be Frightened" is heard. Some of the times the message is well known as when the Angel Gabriel visits Mary and says to her, "Do not be afraid." Another example is when the synagogue official is talking with Jesus asking him to come and cure his daughter. A messenger arrives and announces "Your daughter is dead." Jesus says to the official "Do not be afraid; just have faith and she will be saved." Or, again, on the first day of the week when the women found the tomb empty the angel said to them "Do not be afraid" He has been raised just as he had said."

Each of the incidents involved caused a person or a group of people to be afraid. Sometimes it was because what was being asked of them seemed too much or beyond their capability, other times it was because something that happened seemed to be devastating, so much so that life seemed to be over for that person, and the list of different incidents goes on and on, each one a little different from the other situations.

However, there are two constants in each of these examples; first, the fear of the person or group of people and second, Jesus Christ or a heavenly messenger speaks the message of reassurance that there is no need for fear.



My friends the Word of God is full of God's loving care and support for His people even when they may be fearful. Jesus understood fear well, for was he not like us in all things except sin? And the Church imitating Jesus' concern for people prays at every Mass before the reception of Holy Communion "protect us from all anxiety".

The reason the Lord reassures us about not being afraid, why the Church does the same is because with God we are strengthened and supported in handling the difficulties, the challenges, the unexpected and the unwanted, the sad and upsetting. None us are alone, and as Gabriel said to Mary "Nothing is impossible with God".

The message of this article is not only for all of us as we face the different challenges that come into our personal lives, it is also for all of us as members of the Diocese of Cleveland preparing to receive letters in a very short time which will be hard for some people to receive as their parish may be identified for closing or for merging.

Understandably there will be sadness and upset, there may well be questioning why us and not them, and even for some there will be anger. In all these responses and in other responses there will be some fear as they ask what are we to do, where are we to go. And yet the message from the Word of God, the Scriptures is Be Not Afraid for God is with us. One of the most consoling lines from our Lord Himself is "I will be with you until the end of the world."

Not only is God with us, He is also calling all of us to “Come, follow me” together as the Body of Christ, not as isolated persons or even an isolated parish. No, He is calling us forward as the Church of Cleveland, all the parishes and all the parishioners throughout the eight counties to respond to His mission by being present and offering pastoral care equitably throughout the eight counties of our diocese.

I ask all of us, including myself, to reflect on what it means having God with us so much so that we do not need to be afraid of what lies ahead? No one sums it up better than St. Paul in his letter to the Romans:

“We know that all things work for good for those who love God...For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:28, 37-39)

Be not afraid—God is ever with His people.

(This column originally appeared in the Friday, March 6, 2009 issue of the Catholic Universe Bulletin, the official newspaper of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland.)