

27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle II/ Closing Mass: Healing the Whole Parish Retreat  
October 7, 2018 10:30 AM Mass  
Fr. Joseph Bambenek  
Church of St. Pius X, White Bear Lake

Genesis 2:18-24 Psalm 128 Hebrews 2:9-11 Mark 10:2-16

“Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.”

A summer ago, at the start of my sabbatical to develop the Healing the Whole Parish Retreat, I spent about a month in Lourdes France, a place of healing and miracles since the Blessed Mother appeared there in 1858, the year Minnesota became a state. One of the daily prayer opportunities for pilgrims in Lourdes is a candlelight rosary procession. It begins at 9 PM and starts near the Grotto where Mary appeared to St. Bernadette. One could best describe the Grotto as being a gigantic rock with a series of shallow caves on its face. I decided that every night I was in Lourdes I would participate in the procession, both to reinvigorate my Marian devotion and ensure that I got some exercise. One evening the weather was taking turn for the worse as 9 PM was approaching. In fact, as I approached the Grotto area they were encouraging people to leave the plaza area and make their way into the huge underground Church for the procession. That church is named after St. Pius X, by the way. I thought I had enough time to quick say a prayer at the Grotto, as was my custom, before the storm hit. But I was wrong. Before I knew it, it was not only raining, but there was thunder, close lightning strikes, and hail. Those of us by the Grotto quickly scampered for cover in the caves of the Grotto. It turned out that there was just enough room for the pilgrims to fit in the caves and not get wet. To say that I am not a fan of thunderstorms is an understatement. But this time I was completely calm... Standing in a cave of the Grotto, I felt like Mary’s mantle of protection was over us... that we had nothing to fear. And I was right... for I am here today to tell you the story.

Our Blessed Mother loves us... and wants to be a loving mother to us. She wants us to find comfort under her Mantle when we are hurting or scared. She wants to bind our wounds, and then bring them to Jesus. She is there to be our spiritual mother in the same way that a loving mom wants to comfort her children in their pain and their needs. Just as God wants us to turn to Him in our sorrows, the Blessed Mother wants to comfort us too... although she also realizes that her job is to point people to Jesus as she does so. She wants us to entrust to her whatever binds us up... and then she will take them to Jesus. This movement is beautifully depicted in the Mary, Undoer of Knots devotion, which is a favorite of Pope Francis... The image of Mary Undoer of Knots is what is on the stand next to the tabernacle. For the benefit of those who did not attend the retreat, starting yesterday afternoon, this blue blanket covered the bottom part of the stand and I invited the retreat participants to put under the blanket slips of paper with the wounds they wanted to bring to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for healing as well as what I called tourniquets, those things we do to protect ourselves from hurt when we are trying to survive, but that with time hamper us. That’s the first part of the story, as Paul Harvey would say, more later.

Today’s gospel passage starts out with a really difficult discussion about one of the most controversial and challenging issues in our Church today: the issue of divorce and remarriage.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>And in God’s way of reminding me just how painful this can be, barely a week ago some close relatives shared with me a quandary they were in about divorce and remarriage which took 9 emails back and forth to resolve.

But then, all of a sudden, Jesus is talking about children. About how He wants to embrace the children, even though the Apostles want [Him] to ignore the children.

Let us now put this story into the context of the retreat. If, as many in our time have experienced, an emotional wound that you carry in life is that you were made to feel unimportant... or that your needs were an afterthought... as your parents got divorced, this passage can be a powerful reading, the window can be a powerful image that Jesus wants to embrace you and love you. Or if, as a child, you were made to feel unimportant by adults for any reason... whether by your parents, your pastor, your teachers or others... perhaps you were to be seen but not heard... perhaps you were told that you were an inconvenience... perhaps you were told that you were a mistake... perhaps you were overlooked because you were not intellectually or athletically talented... Jesus wants to embrace you. Or, perhaps, you or someone you know was made to feel unimportant by a successor of the Apostles, a bishop, after you brought forward a situation in which you were abused... Jesus wants to embrace you. And furthermore, no matter how old we are and regardless of what has happened in our lives... we are all God's children, and Jesus wants to embrace us in whatever pains we carry.

We at St. Pius don't have to work too hard to imagine today's gospel passage... to imagine what Jesus with the children would have looked like, because on the west wall in the back part of our church building is what I consider the most distinctive image in our church building: the stained glass window that depicts today's gospel scene: when Jesus showed love to the children. Regardless of our age, as we look at the window, Jesus wants us to imagine ourselves as a child in that window.

And now for the rest of the story, as Paul Harvey would say... if you move forward along the west wall of the Church all the way up to the front corner you find the cornerstone of the Church. Since soon after the abuse scandal broke again, I have had a spiritual sense that part of the healing of our parish, especially healing from the wounds we carry from things that happened here at St. Pius, would involve the cornerstone in a symbolic way. Why the cornerstone? Well, I have heard over time that our founding pastor was generally known to be more harsh than gentle. And it is a matter of public record that he was credibly accused of abusing children here. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that when our parish was founded, our parish territory was carved out from that of St. Mary's, and the relationship with the parishes has not been without challenges ever since. Thus it seems that for true healing to occur, the healing love of Jesus must be applied back to the conception of the parish.

Some of you were here on October 13, 2014, when I consecrated our parish to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The image of Mary that now sits over the cornerstone was obtained for that consecration. But as time went on I have had the sense that more was needed, that somehow the cornerstone needed to be wrapped or something in the mantle of Mary. That our whole history as a parish, symbolized in its founding by the cornerstone, with all of its joys and wounds, with all its successes and sorrows since then should be placed under Mary's mantle of love and protection... just as the retreatants have placed their own hurts and limitations under her mantle.

In Church symbolism, the cornerstone most often represents Jesus. For 9 months Jesus lived in Mary's womb, under her mantle. We can assume that at times when Jesus wanted comfort... when He was the age of the children He is depicted as being with in the stained glass window... He, like [most] every child, would have run to his mother for comfort and would have literally found Himself under her mantle as He did so.

That is a long way of telling you why, a year ago, I went to Lourdes looking for a beautiful piece of blue cloth in which we could wrap the cornerstone. You can imagine how odd the scene must have been of me spending a couple days searching through the gift shops of Lourdes looking for just the right piece of Mary-blue cloth. But after several days of looking, the search was fruitless. As I was laying in my bed in the inn where I was staying, I asked God to help me find the right cloth. Immediately my eyes shifted to the very simple blue blanket that was on the room's shelf, and deep in my heart, I knew immediately that blanket was it. So I asked the innkeeper if I could buy the blanket and so I did. I later realized that the inn where I was staying was L'Hotel Rocher... meaning, the hotel of the Rock. Named after the Grotto rock where I had experienced Mary's mantle of protection earlier in the midst of the hailstorm. While I had in mind a fine piece of cloth, the blanket was made of very simple fabric. Yet Mary chose to appear to St. Bernadette in rock made of simple stone... just as Jesus came into the world in a simple stable.

So as soon as I am done with this homily, I am going to take two strips of cloth that Elaine & Sue, the dynamic duo who lead our Church Decorating Team, cut from the blanket and place it under the image of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and over the cornerstone. The rest of the blanket is what is under the statue of Mary right behind me [signifying her mantle under which retreatants have put their hurts and their knots]. I realize that the simple piece of cloth is not nearly as beautiful as the stained glass window further back in the church. But it is my hope that just as that window serves as a beautiful, ongoing reminder of Jesus' desire to be close to us and especially to children, the simple mantle of Mary over the cornerstone will be an ongoing reminder of Mary's tender motherly love for us and her desire to be close to us. A reminder that regardless of what has happened to us as people and as a parish in the past or present, and in the future, we are not alone, we are not unloved, we are not helpless. May her mantle over our cornerstone inspire us to entrust our needs to her, for her give us comfort as she then passed them on to her Son, the true cornerstone of the Church. And as a result, may St. Pius become ever more a place where people come to experience the healing love of Jesus; may they even come here to experience healing from the wounds once inflicted upon them here... so that freed from those impacts we can, at whatever our age, be more like the children in our stained glass window, cognizant of Jesus' words, "Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it."

[At this point I walked over to the cornerstone with Fr. Desmond and prayed]

Dear Blessed Mother Mary, on this Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, we are reminded that for 9 months you carried Jesus, the true cornerstone of our faith, under your mantle in your womb. As Jesus was growing up, He undoubtedly found love and comfort beneath that mantle when He faced life's adversities.

Today we place this very simple cloth to represent your mantle, as it descends downward from the image of your Immaculate Heart, and goes above our parish cornerstone. As we do so, we place our parish, and its entire history, under your Mantle of protection, love and healing. When we are in need of your comfort, especially when we have been wounded by things that have happened to us at St. Pius, may this image of your mantle remind us that you want us to bring our hurts past and present, as well as our joys, to you, so that you can tend our hearts like a loving mother, and hand them on to Jesus for Him to apply His healing love.

And we now pray, as Fr. Desmond sprinkles the cornerstone and mantle with water from Lourdes:

Lord, in the blessed Virgin you have given your pilgrim Church an image of the glory to come. May those who have fashioned this image of Mary look to her as a model of holiness for all your chosen people.  
Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let us stand and profess what we believe.

