



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

Final Mass at St. Boniface Church

Homily

[*Exodus* 3: 1-6, 9-12; *Psalms* 103; *Matthew* 11: 25-27]

Yesterday I met with some members of the parish leadership to plan for this mass. We all wanted to be sure that we would have on hand everything necessary for the Eucharistic gathering, so we discussed the readings, the music, vestments and the like. To be really prepared, we all knew that the most important consideration is this: will there be enough Kleenex?! We anticipated a lot of tears.

What I suggest to you is that the experience of tears is precisely what brings together tonight our memories of the past and our gaze toward the future with the Scripture readings we have just heard. Tears give eloquent expression to the depth of emotion we feel this evening, and at the same time open our minds and hearts to a future full of hope. I'll explain what I mean.

I expect it is right to say that the immediate cause of the tears shed this evening is sadness. This building is your spiritual house, and has been for 65 years. Naturally we think of all that has happened here in that time: the priests who have served, the sacraments celebrated, the sharing of both joy and grief among members of a community who care deeply about one another, the social gatherings, the catechetical sessions, the outreach to the needy, and, of course, the food. We think, too, of the pioneers, who worked and sacrificed to make this parish community a thriving reality over the years. So much has been given in time, talent and treasure – too much, in fact, ever to measure. Just like any family that grieves to leave a treasured home to move elsewhere, this parish community recognizes with deep sadness the need to let go of this place and move to new situations. How can there not be tears?

As we bring our sadness before the Word of God, and allow it to speak to us, tears continue to well up but from a different source. They slowly become, first, tears of consolation and then ultimately of joy and thanksgiving.

Consider the first reading. It gives us the wondrous encounter between Moses and Almighty God. The passage recounts one of the most sublime moments of God's self-revelation to humanity. God first reveals Himself to Moses this way: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Here God is saying that He comes close, He makes Himself present in the lives of His people, He is there where His people are. Furthermore, God is not indifferent to the tears of His people. He tells Moses, "The cry of the Israelites has now come to me," and then begins to unfold the plan He has to save His people from slavery. This is when tears of sadness start to become ones of consolation. God is with His people, present and at work in every circumstance, guiding all things in accord with His loving purpose.

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When we look back over the past sixty-five years, what we must in faith recognize is that God has been present to us, present with us, to shape and direct all that has transpired according to His good pleasure. The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses is also the God of every individual person and family that has called the church of St. Boniface home. Our every cry has come to Him, and He has not left us abandoned. In this place, we, too, like Moses, have stood on holy ground and have heard the voice of God, in Sacred Scripture, console us with the assurance of His presence. How can there not be tears?

Yet another source for tears, copious ones, emerges as we turn to the Gospel. There we see that the wellspring of tears is joy. The Gospel text, like the passage from *Exodus*, speaks of God's self-revelation to His people, yet in a way that unfolds the divine mystery far beyond what was made known to Moses. As Jesus prays to the Father, he says this: "No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." God reveals Himself perfectly and definitively in the gift of His Son, incarnate of the Virgin Mary. As Jesus prays, he rejoices. I wonder if he shed tears of joy as he prayed? I wouldn't be surprised if he did. He is full of joy because people have accepted revelation! They have received and welcomed both his person and message. That fills Jesus with ineffable and overflowing joy.

Here we touch the very heart of the life of this parish over sixty-five years. Revelation is given in order to be received. God wants us to know Him and accept the truth of His love. When His revelation is received as true, joy erupts, often through tears. In the study of the Word, in sacramental celebrations, in interactions with one another as a community of faith, Jesus has been present here to reveal the face of God, to manifest the truth of God and His saving will. The members of this parish have received that revelation as true, and welcomed it as the lodestar of their lives. Jesus rejoices before the Father at the faith with which his revelation has been welcomed in this parish. We, too, rejoice, as we ponder in faith all that the Lord has showered upon us, and at the sure and certain hope that comes from knowing His blessings will accompany us always. How can there not be tears?

Is there enough Kleenex? Possibly not. Tears rightly flow tonight, but not only of sadness. They give expression, also, to the consolation that comes from knowing God has been and will be with us, and the joy that springs from the truth of God's victorious love, revealed in Jesus Christ. In this final celebration of the Eucharist in this building, may God bless our tearfulness and make of our own tears a revelation to others of the faith, consolation and joy that has sustained this community for sixty-five years.

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St. Boniface Church
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