

***Twenty-sixth Sunday Per Annum (A)***  
***October 1, 2017.***

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:5).*

Our second reading taken from St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, includes a canticle or hymn that summarizes for us the Mystery of the Christ, Our Saviour: *Christ Jesus...emptied himself...taking the form of a servant... He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – death on a cross (Phil. 2:6-11)*. When we gaze upon the Crucified Lord we see before us the most concise and comprehensive statement about the Word made flesh: *Jesus emptied himself*. As we imitate the pattern of His life, we imitate Our Lord's self-emptying in lives marked by humility and charity. We are all servants of the same Mystery. This is true of everyone in the Church; from the greatest to the least, including the Holy Father, Pope Francis. Although he is the supreme authority in the Church, he is a servant of Christ, guardian of the truth of Christ and *servant of the servants of God*.

Today, I must speak to you about something that took place on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, last Saturday: in an epoch-making act, Catholic clergy and lay scholars from around the world publicly issued what they are calling a *Filial Correction* to Pope Francis. This document accuses the pope of propagating heresies against the Catholic Faith by supporting heretical positions about marriage, the moral life and the Eucharist. No similar action has been taken since 1333 when Pope John XXII received a similar admonition. I am addressing this matter today because it is very important that we understand what this means and also because it is no less important that we be rightly informed. Before I do so however, I would like to place what is happening within a greater context and this may help us to understand how it is that we come to this. In his last public discourse, Pope Benedict XVI spoke to the clergy of the city of Rome about the Second Vatican Council and how it was interpreted. This is what he said: *The world interpreted the Council through the eyes of the media instead of seeing the true Council of the Fathers and their key vision of faith...The journalists' interpretation of the Council was political and as a result the Council was trivialized with disastrous consequences for the Church....Seminaries were closed, convents were closed...the virtual Council [this is how he described it] was stronger than the real Council.* (<http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-vatican-ii-as-i-saw-it-full-text>). Many of us have lived through these confusing times and we have seen firsthand the disastrous consequences Pope Benedict spoke of. The confusion or diabolical disorientation that both the Church and the world have experienced and continue to experience has its origin in the trivialization of the faith and the things of God. Many have lost their way and many in the Church today it must be said, would like the Church to follow the world and its ways, especially in issues of morality. We will endeavour to avoid these errors and we must not allow ourselves to be deceived or disheartened either by altogether dismissing this appeal made to the Holy Father or by allowing the media to interpret what is taking place in the heart of the Catholic Church.

We have learned that on August 11<sup>th</sup>, the Holy Father received a letter that has now been made fully public which asks the Holy Father to clarify certain positions concerning marriage, the moral life and the Eucharist. The twenty-five page document begins with these words: *Most Holy Father, With profound grief, but moved by fidelity to Our Lord Jesus Christ, by love for the Church and for the papacy, and by filial devotion towards yourself, we are compelled to address a correction to Your Holiness on account of the propagation of heresies effected by the Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia and by other words, deeds and omissions of Your*

*Holiness.* As you can see, the tone of this letter is very respectful and the very first sentence expresses everything we need to know always and everywhere: *fidelity to Our Lord Jesus Christ.* The Holy Father's principal duty, by virtue of his office as pope and as successor of the Apostle Peter is to confirm, that is, strengthen us in the faith. Recall the words of Our Lord: *Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren (Lk. 22:31-32).* These words tell us also what we must do: imitate Our Lord and pray for the Holy Father.

Since the election of Pope Francis, many outside the Church and many Catholics also have both implied and explicitly said that Church teaching would change on any number of different aspects of our faith. The truth is that the pope has no authority to change what has been revealed to us by Our Lord, and neither do we have such authority. To think otherwise is not to think as a Catholic. The pope is the principal custodian of Sacred Tradition that is to be faithfully handed on. The Second Vatican Council very clearly taught that *Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls (Dei Verbum, 10).*

The salvation of souls is the supreme law of the Church (*Salus animarum suprema lex*); and this should be our primary concern. We have everything we need to do this here in our parish and indeed in every Catholic parish throughout the world. We have the Blessed Sacrament, Our Lord Himself. We have Our Lady and her Rosary which we have been asked to pray every day by Our Lady in so many different apparitions but especially at Fatima. Today we begin the month of the Holy Rosary. Pray the Rosary. We have the example of the Saints whose lives are examples of service and self-emptying in imitation of Our Saviour. And we have our Catholic Faith, our victory over the world.

In these confused and confusing times Our Lord expects us to confirm one another in the faith, the unchanging Catholic Faith that alone is the source of salvation. We must never forget the promise made by Our Lord to St. Peter: *You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it (Mt. 16:18).* The rock is St. Peter's confession of faith in Our Lord's divinity and this rock is the unshakeable foundation of our lives. It was on the strength of this faith that the Apostles won the world for Christ; and it is by this same strength that we will remain steadfast in the truth of Christ and be of the same mind as Our Lord *Who emptied Himself...taking the form of a servant.*