

January 18, 2020 – “The Call to Dine With Jesus”

The beautiful theme for our Mass today is Jesus calls us to dine with him. Jesus calls us to dine with him. I’ve had the opportunity to go to both Spain and Italy, but it was actually in Italy where I saw fields of beautiful sunflowers. I’ve never seen sunflowers in such numbers and such size before. And there was at time when St. Theresa of Avila said the following “We are like sunflowers. In the morning as the sun shines down on the flowers, they then turn and look toward heaven.” As the sun shines down on the flowers, they then turn and look toward heaven. I think this is a beautiful description of what we mean by grace. It’s only in response to the sun that the flowers can turn. And that’s true of the Christian life.

It’s only in response to the Son of God that we can turn towards him and in this beautiful painting by Caravaggio, this is what he’s representing. The figure of Christ has his hand depicted in the same way that Michelangelo depicts the hand of God when he is creating Adam. And here the hand of Jesus, which is like the sun towards the sunflower, is pointing towards Matthew. And Matthew has this look of surprise on his face, “Who me? Your’re calling me?” And here’s the wonderful thing about the Gospel. Jesus calls Matthew, not so that first he can say ‘ok Matthew, now I’ve got work for you to do.’ No, Jesus calls Matthew so that he can dine with him.



And this is a very important part of our Catholic life. Our relationship with God is not primarily about so he can sign us up to work for him. No, our relationship with God is one where we come into this place where like the sunflowers that are turned to the sky so too we are turned toward God. And it’s out of that place of deepening intimacy with Christ that we find true meaning through purpose and true dignity.

It's interesting in the Gospel when Jesus says, "I haven't come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." And in our Old Testament reading we hear about the call of Saul who will be called King. Saul stood out as being the most handsome; he would have been on the cover of GQ quarterly. He was the kind of man that people turned and looked at him. But that was Saul's problem because as we read the story of Saul, he becomes more jealous, he becomes more suspicious, he becomes more of a controlling individual and the king that God wanted him to be, he never became because he didn't rely on grace. He relied on himself.

We, as Catholic people, in a particular way, are to be people whose lives are characteristically grace filled. And if we think about that in relation to this week which is called 'The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity', the more I think about it, the more I realize that we as Catholics, have to take the initiative and the lead on this prayer because God, in a particular way, has entrusted to us special graces and what we pray people will see in Catholic Christians more and more, is the quality, the character of those who, in responding to grace, are turned toward the sun. So in the way we relate to others, the way we relate to Christians who are not a part of the Catholic faith but are truly in love with the Lord and want to follow him. They won't see us as judgemental and distant but as those whose own lives, because of what Jesus is doing in us, that they will see us as being attractive. And part of my prayer is that more will then come to see the fullness of Christ's life is within the Catholic church because it's here that the fullness of the sacraments and thereby the fullness of grace is available to us.

May we allow Jesus, shine towards us, and in turn may we turn our faces and our lives evermore towards him so that we can be, so to speak, like a beautiful field of glorious sunflowers.