

Synod Closing Mass Homily
Saturday, September 19, 2015
Webster Arena

An ancient Chinese proverb says that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. We find this to be true in our personal lives, when as babies, we take our first steps and a world is opened up to us which we continue to explore each day. It is even more true for the remarkable adventure and journey of faith that began with Christ and His apostles and has continued for more than 2,000 years as the community of the Church.

Each of us has come here, disciples of the Lord, because we have participated in this remarkable journey of faith since the day of our baptism. Each of us has encountered the Lord Jesus in our personal lives, and having heeded his summons to “Come follow Me,” we form his Mystical Body here in Fairfield County, each day walking with faith and not by sight alone. Each of us has been blessed, empowered, nourished by grace and the Eucharist, and sent in mission, joining the countless men, women, young people and children who have gone before us and from whom we have received the precious gift of our Catholic faith. It is a faith that we live one day at a time, one step at a time.

On this beautiful morning we also gather in this arena to celebrate the remarkable journey of the Synod that you and I have walked together this past year. For let us recall that a Synod is a “sacred journey”, led by Christ who gathered us as His people in discernment and prayer. Today we celebrate the fact that we have walked this “sacred journey”, one step at a time, with courage, honesty, respect, a thirst for justice and charity, a collaborative spirit and most of all, confident hope. And from this place, we will be invited by the Lord to take the next step into a future of renewal for ourselves and as a Church.

So we must be clear about what we do here today. For we have come to end nothing but to begin anew by seeking the ongoing spiritual and pastoral renewal of our diocesan Church, one step at a time. So before we take this next great step, let us pause to rest and remember.

Let us first rest in the love of the Lord Jesus for you and me. It is a divine love whose power we have rediscovered in our Synod, when we listened to each other respectfully, dialogued with those whose opinions differed from ours and when we gathered in joyful worship of our God who considers our diversity a reflection of His own beauty. Today we reaffirm our love for our Church, with all its strengths, challenges and even failings and we proclaim our love for the Lord Jesus, the Savior and Redeemer of us all.

We also remember the challenges that we identified during our Synod journey with honesty and clarity. For we heard that far too many of our Catholic brothers and sisters feel disaffected and alienated from our Church and choose no longer to worship with us in faith. We reaffirm the fact that even one disaffected brother and sister is one too many.

Far too many of our sisters and brothers are hungering to feel loved, to deepen their life of prayer, to be treated with justice and charity, to expand their knowledge of their faith and at times seek such help to little avail. We also admitted that some of our parish and school communities are in need of evangelical renewal, manifested in the desire to develop more welcoming hearts, to offer more joyful worship of the Lord and to be of more generous service to those in need, both inside and outside of our Church. We also saw the face of injustice in many forms all around us and recognized that the call to charity at times falls on deaf ears. Finally, we also heard the voice of our young church that yearns to be

affirmed, empowered and given the opportunity to assume leadership in our communities and across our Church

Today, my sisters and brothers, we have come here not simply to remember these challenges but to gather in celebration with joyful hope. Because in countless ways throughout the Synod, we were renewed, strengthened and surprised by the divine gift of hope that has deepened within and among us. For our hope is founded on our belief that Jesus Christ is risen and alive in our midst. It is Christ who has called each of us to holiness of life through the power of the Holy Spirit and now He invites us to receive His sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity to go out in renewed mission to sanctify the world.

My friends, we have come to celebrate our confident hope that each of the challenges we face has become a sacred opportunity for the Church to be renewed and grow stronger. As those who came before us in faith learned in their own age, so it will be true for you and me. When the People of God faced challenges in past ages, those challenges did not weaken them or compromise their resolve. Rather those challenges called them back to Christ and allowed them to rediscover anew from whence came their strength. The same will be true for the challenges that you and I face together. As the Lord teaches us in today's Gospel, He will remain with us and His church forever. So we know in our hearts and proclaim to the world that the best years of the Catholic Church in Fairfield County are not behind us but ahead of us. Put simply, our hope does not lie solely on our personal abilities, talents, programs or initiatives alone. Our hope rests in someone, Jesus the Lord, without whom we have nothing and with whom we have everything of lasting value.

The Lord has another lesson to teach us this day. For just as a vine has many branches, each branch alive and growing because it is grafted onto the vine, so too, the Lord teaches us that each of us is a branches grafted upon Himself, the Vine, from whom we receive our strength and hope. It is interesting to note that at first glance a vine looks wild, unwieldy, and even overgrown. It seems to lack any method or order. However, we know that first glances are always deceiving. If we look deeper, we can see that there is a beautiful order to every vine. Each branch is different but needed. No branch competes with the others branches. The vine equally feeds them all, for no branch can live without the vine. And while there will be times when a branch needs to be pruned, it is only so that the branch can grow again with greater strength and vigor.

In our Synod journey, we discovered that the same is true of you and me, branches grafted upon the Vine who is Christ. At first glance, our situation may have looked wild, unwieldy and overgrown. But as we looked deeper, we saw a beautiful order to our life as a diocesan church. Each of us is a branch that is unrepeatable and unique. Each branch is needed, beautiful, and called to live in harmony and unity in accord with our state of life. And while we recognized that some of our branches will need to be pruned, such purification is help us to grow stronger in faith, hope and love.

My friends, the Synod has given us a direction and path to walk in our journey of faith and I invite each of you to join me in walking with Christ, one step at a time.

To all in leadership, to my brother priests and deacons, women and men in consecrated life, our seminarians and lay leaders, the Synod reminded us that Christ has called us to lead this great Church into spiritual renewal. Let us recommit ourselves to walk

the path of personal holiness and “seek not to be served but to serve and to give our lives as ransom for the many.”

To all the families in our midst, I encourage you to become domestic churches throughout our Diocese. Invite Christ to sit at the head of your table and at the center of your family and learn again the great call to love one another deeply and to be loved graciously in return.

To the young Church, I ask you to be courageous disciples of the Lord and have no fear! Come to know the Lord Jesus in a personal and intimate way and love Him because He loves you deeply. The Lord is asking you to go out and in service to sanctify the world for Him.

To all our communities of faith, I plead with you to lift our minds, our hearts and our hands in joyful worship of the Father, celebrate our diversity as our strength and learn more deeply the great treasure that is our Catholic faith.

And to those among us who feel alienated, who are seeking hope, feel lost and unwelcomed, victims of injustice, and in need of help, know that you are not alone. We are your brothers and sisters in Christ and we are here to love and serve you one step at a time.

We gather today in the largest city in our Diocese, whose name we bear as a Diocese. One of its most historic sites is Black Rock Harbor Lighthouse that was built in 1808 and remains to this day. You can see a replica of the Tower built in the back of the arena by our young people. It is composed of nearly 10,000 individual food items that will be sent to feed the poor and homeless in our county.

For 207 years the Black Rock Harbor Lighthouse has stood as a quiet sentinel for ships and seafarers traversing the dark and quiet of the night. It has saved many lives and

brought tens of thousands to safe harbor- because they saw its light and followed its direction.

Today, in the heart of this city, we gather to seek the light that will lead us safely forward in the next steps of our synod journey. That Light is Christ- a light whom we need now more than ever. Look to the Light of Christ to lead us to renewal and new life.

Perhaps you are here and at times find yourself feeling adrift, alone, confused or even unwanted? Perhaps at times you may be wondering where the ship of Christ, the Church, sailing amidst the storms of our modern culture and being buffeted by wind and rain, is going? During those moments of traveling through the darkness of the night, let us keep our eyes fixed Christ. For He alone stands in our midst as Savior and redeemer and can command the waves to silence. He will lead us to renewal and bring us to the safe shores of everlasting life.

And if the light of Christ seems dim in your eyes, do what mariners have done for centuries. Look to the light of the Moon that appears in the darkest moments of the night, reflecting the light of the sun that is hidden in the night sky but remains ever present. As disciples, we have such a celestial Moon. She is the Morning Star, the ever Virgin Mother of God, who comes to us as advocate, mother, protector and guide. May Mary our Mother always lead us to Christ Her Son and to the glory that come only from Him. When life is dark, look to her for guidance and light.

Today we will consecrate ourselves and our Diocese to Mary's protection, under the title of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. May Our Blessed Mother lead the ship of Christ, our Diocesan church, on a path for renewal and take us safely to Christ, Her Son and our Lord.

So if a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step, my friends let us leave this place in the power of the Holy Spirit, ready to take a first step into renewal to the honor and glory of Christ, the True Vine and Light of the World.

Who here is ready to join me and take this step? Whoever you may be, let us be on our way.