

HOMILY OF REVEREND MONSIGNOR RICHARD E. MARCHESE
ST. HELEN PARISH
PASTOR INSTALLATION—SEPTEMBER 8, 2005

Who know the ways of the Lord? Who can even begin to discern His ways? For those who believe, nothing just simply happens without a purpose. A number of years ago I had the occasion to meet with a very wise, holy and much beloved Bishop, the late Charles Mulrooney. During the course of our conversation, I mentioned the word ‘accidentally.’ He gently reminded me that nothing at all happens ‘accidentally,’ but everything happens providentially. All of our lives are within the will of God—the God who causes, or at least permits, in order to bring forth some good. There is a plan and purpose for everything. We must never forget that. It’s what our faith is all about.

Let me give you an example. In the late 1950’s and early 60’s a young man was struggling during his adolescence with a call that he thought might have been to the priesthood. And so he went to seek the counsel of a young priest who was the chaplain of his high school. The patient chaplain encouraged the young man over and over again to persevere, and said that God would give him the strength to walk the long road toward his goal. I was that struggling young man. The priest counselor was Father Ed McGinnis. Who knew that one day I would have the privilege of standing here in this very awesome place that he was called to as shepherd, in the very Church that he himself would build!

Who knows the ways of the Lord? Divine Providence, Divine Providence. Those lines of intersection that come together in our lives are gently guided by the all-powerful hand of an all-knowing God.

I look out tonight at so many wonderful people who have been and who are so good to me, so many wonderful priests who helped form the pattern in the fabric of my life. I am particularly grateful to them—to Bishop Ignatius Catanello—Bishop Iggy—especially. We met years back in the major seminary of Huntington (although a number of years apart). Years later our paths would cross again when we would serve together in the administration of our prep seminary in Elmhurst. Now I serve in the very parish that he loved so much as a curate.

The lines of intersection do not stop there. What of Father Catanello’s close friend, Father Jerry Barbarito, with whom he worked in this parish? I had the special privilege of getting to know Father Jerry when we both served as priest secretaries in different places. How well I remember celebrating with Bishop Jerry, Msgr. Keane and Msgr. Maresca the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass together with Pope John Paul II in his private chapel at Castel Gandolfo. Memories like that you can’t forget.

Why do I mention these names? Simply because the priests of St. Helen's represent the point of intersection for what is happening tonight. Permit me to go a bit further. Not even two decades ago I had a young man in class who would eventually, as I said to him quite often, take his place in forming young minds and hearts in priestly training. That man today you know is Father John Cush, who is dearly remembered by the parishioners here.

There is another priest very much loved by our parishioners. I also met him in the major seminary and shared loads of laughter with him. He is Bishop Catanello's classmate, Father Jack Maloney. We happily served together only a few short months ago in St. Frances Cabrini Parish. He came back into my world, I believe, to remind me to savor and enjoy life to the fullest. Thank you, Father Jack, for sharing your sensitivity and appreciation for all that is good and beautiful.

I realize now that my acquaintances with a number of priests from St. Helen's was all a preparation for the good spirit that I would find here in this marvelous parish.

Everything in life is a preparation for what is to come. As we adore and thank the living God tonight we give ourselves over to His gracious will. We who struggle to follow the path of holiness must always do this. Such was the case of two of the last of the hidden figures of the Old Testament—Joachim and Ann. They came together as man and wife and would become the parents of the woman whose birth we celebrate tonight. In faith they gave themselves over to God and God did the rest.

In the Gospel of Matthew for this evening's liturgy—the very Gospel given also to us for the Friday of the Third Week in Advent, the day of my ordination to the priesthood—Joseph was called by the angel to watch over and shepherd the young woman Mary and her son about to be born. The angel reminds him not to be fearful—God is with us.

Tonight we once again take the Gospel message to heart. We are reminded of all those called in imitation of Joseph to be true shepherds, of those who must watch over and care for the Church, the people of God. We think tonight of all those outstanding shepherds, like Peter and Ignatius of Antioch, Augustine and Ambrose and Gregory the Great, in whose broad shadow we humbly walk and through whose intercession we find help and strength. Our thoughts turn tonight especially to the one called to be our supreme shepherd on earth, Benedict XVI. He bears the baptismal name of Joseph, while given the office bestowed upon Peter and his successors. He spoke less than two weeks ago of his recent visit to Cologne, Germany, for World Youth Day. He told the bishops and the pastors of the Church there that “it is urgent to lead the people of today to discover the true face of God. Psalm 104: *Quaerite faciem ejus*

semper—seek His face continually.” “The discovery of ‘God’s face’ is never exhausted,” says our Holy Father. “The more we enter into the splendor of Divine love, the more beautiful it is to go forward in the search—so that to the degree that love grows—so grows the search of Him who is found—*amore crescente inquisitio crescat inventi*.” And the Holy Father adds: “This is the experience to which we also aspire from the depth of our hearts.”

And so this is our work—this is the ultimate work of the Pastor—to guide his people in their search for God. “What are your plans, Monsignor?” so many people wonder about and ask. This is my ultimate priority—to discover God over and over again with you. And it is faith and prayer that will ultimately accomplish this. Oh yes, we will have our countless meetings, our plans, our projects, we will do all the necessary maintenance and refurbishment—but “unless we allow faith,” as Benedict reminds us, “to project for us a path in time toward a God ever-new in His infinity,” then we will fail and fail miserably. These are God-given thoughts.

Let me tell you a brief story. A few short years ago I had to make a trip to Prague in the Czech Republic. I was in the sacristy of a Church preparing for Mass and I came upon an old poster resting on the vesting case. It was rolled up, all torn and dirty. I asked the parish priest if I could get a copy of the poster. He looked at me with amazement and told me to take the one that was there, since it was of no use to anyone for the moment. I took the poster, tried to tape it up, and carefully carried it back to the States, where I had it restored. That old poster is in front of me now—it bears the image of the Mother of God in all tenderness holding her Son, Jesus. It is the gentle image of the Lady of Good Counsel. For me it is a treasure.

There is a great lesson in this discarded poster, because it represents what we might at times be doing with our faith, with our Church, with our devotion, with one another. We might cast it all aside as worn and useless, but if we are patient and take the time to renew it and to restore it to its pristine elegance, we will discover a beautiful image—the image of Mary gazing upon her Son, the second person of the Blessed Trinity made man. How wondrous and beautiful an image—the eternal wrapped up in the human! Again, Benedict reminds us:

“Is there anyone who does not know Dostoyevsky’s often quoted sentence: ‘The Beautiful will save us’? However, people usually forget that Dostoyevsky is referring here to the redeeming beauty of Christ. We must learn to see Him. Nothing can bring us into close contact with the beauty of Christ Himself other than the world of beauty created by faith and light that shines out from the faces of the saints, to whom His own life becomes visible...our faith,” says our Holy Father, “must be understood, lived, acquired, and visible—that seeing it, people can

say: ‘Yes, that is something to believe in, that is the way in which life can be lived, that is how one can find answers to the questions of life.’ ” Faith...Faith...

answers to the questions of life.

May Benedict our shepherd continue to be for us a light in our darkness. *Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.*

Tonight we say to someone we love so much: ‘Happy Birthday.’ And when we say that we mean, ‘I am so happy that you are alive, that you are part of my world.’ And we say most wholeheartedly tonight to our Mother: ‘You give us Life itself, Mary; you gather your children in your embrace. You are the image of the Church. You are the very model of devotion and fidelity. Through your birth we find rebirth. Through your life we find Life itself. You are the radiant dawn awaiting the brightness of the Son.’

‘We live in a spirit of gratitude for all you have given us through your intercession—for all those who have gone before us, and for those here present. Help us never to forget that each of us in our own uniquely created way has a mission, a definite purpose in this world. In moments of doubt and struggle, be for us our anchor and our strength.’ *O Vita, dulcedo et spes nostra.*

‘O Mary, tonight and always, we give you our hearts.’

‘Happy Birthday, O dearest of Mothers.’ Amen.