



The Diocese of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 13th 2016

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

"There once was a boy so meek and modest, he was awarded a Most Humble badge. The next day, it was taken away because he wore it. Here endeth the lesson.

I have been putting a lot of thought into how to address the upheaval that has come to us as a people in the United States this past week, and yet also honor the integrity of my office within the church and not abuse my power or position. I knew deep down that I *must* say something - I knew from the moment I woke on Wednesday. But, I also knew that I would not open my mouth until I had spent some time with God and in reflection first. I knew - as a pastor and leader in this Church - that before I stated a single word to you, I must be sure of my compass and that I knew where 'true North' was again. I knew that I must set aside my own 'stuff' and my own personal prejudices in order to hear the 'still small voice of God'. So, I waited and prayed and now I am ready. And, what better way to communicate with you than in the response to the Gospel we follow; the words of life of our Lord and Savior?

Some of the most incredible people I know voted for Secretary Hillary Clinton this past week. Some of the most incredible people I know voted for President-elect Trump this past week, too. These folks I know - and know so well - that voted for Donald Trump are not racists, or misogynistic, or anti-LGBTQ. They do not wish for you to lose your health benefits nor infringe on your dignity. They do not hate Blacks or Latinos or Muslims or wish for the creation of a 'White-only' race.

So if you are someone, like me, who woke up Wednesday morning perplexed or angry or hurt. I ask you to *Stop*. Stop for a moment before your next word, or action, or mean spirited or divisive post or Meme on social media. *Stop* for a moment and see the person next to you - on the street car, or in your own family, as not someone who is hateful or intolerant, but your neighbor by Biblical mandate. I recall the words of Winston Churchill who once said that *"Democracy is the worst form of Government, except all those other forms that have been tried."* We shall overcome our challenges, as we always do, and we shall prevail despite our decisions. And, no matter what our choices have caused, as a collective, it is far better than any Autocrat making them *for* us.

If you were one of thousands who lashed out in your pain and human weakness. *Stop*. Wake up tomorrow and begin again. Stop and see *that* person - the one who differs from you in their views or outlook - as a fellow neighbor, human being, broken like you, bearing the same concerns, and also the best of what makes this Nation so great. If you fail to do so, you become the worst of what we *could* become. It will happen if good people fail to honor, respect, and love one another.

Do not hate because someone does not look, or act like you, or that their beliefs do not align with yours so perfectly. Our nation once stumbled over that great hurdle in a powerful and wretched way when we declared a man at 2/3 a human being because of the mere color of his skin, or when we failed to allow a woman the right to vote simply because they had breasts and were therefore less than a man. What a terrible world it would be if we were all the same. And, whatever you do, don't lose the quality of people in *your life* because you chose hate over love and tolerance; there is enough of that to go around without you adding to it.

So, yes, Donald J. Trump is now the President-elect. After January 20th he will be my President, and your President, and our Nation's leader and Commander in Chief. If he fails, *we all fail*. This is now our opportunity; an opportunity to be a better people than we have ever been before. Don't panic. Do not hate. Do not lash out. Do not fall apart, or into the depths of despair. Rather, *stand up!* Stand up for human rights and the truth; be the stronghold for minorities, immigrants seeking a better life, and aliens of all sort; *do not* build walls that divide, but work for justice and peace that *unite* every color and every nation; *be* the decency we need in this nation. Rise up for Gay and Lesbians and the transgendered, hurting painfully in the shadows, lift your voice for women's rights and equal pay; stand for marriage equality and for the negation of racism and isolationism. Be nice, not mean. Be extra moral; a better person, a good Christian, and a stronger Catholic. Inspire with your optimism and most of all *love everyone*, even those you disagree with, or find distasteful; who think differently than you, for in *that* love, you will find a lesson that will allow you to grow, too.

For those Catholics who think this past presidential campaign was reduced to one issue, that of abortion, as many of my fellow Bishops have sadly promoted, I fear you missed the greatest lesson of our faith: *the inherent dignity of the human person*. All human persons. Yes, born and unborn, but all life – even those you hate – are worthy of our protection, love, and hope. Being pro-life is more than just the unborn child. It is health care, women's issues, abuse and poverty concerns, the water in Flint, Michigan and global warming, too; child education and protection of our youngest, immigration, care of the foreigner in our land, and working to ensure that every child has a warm and safe bed, nutritious food in their bellies, and the unconditional and unrestricted love of a family in whatever form that family takes in order to do just that: love.

So let me address *who we are*, as a parish, a diocese, and a greater church, and what guides and informs those bishops, priests, deacons, and religious who lead us so well. This small part of the greater Catholic Church is welcoming beyond measure. This place, this humble and spirited place – an even smaller part of the smaller place we hold in our greater and universal Church – a place called Saint Miriam was built *not* on hate, but on the unconditional love that comes from a radical welcome that begins at our *doors* and encompasses our *Altar*, too. It is the living Gospel made manifest. This place, a place that 'they' said could not be built; a place where Catholics could love everyone with a wild abandon and still remain validly and vitally Catholic is thriving, because we believe that God created all and lives in all and is part of all.

So let me be clear:

- If you are more interested in hating than confessing your own hate, if you wish to live arrogantly or not care for the earth, if you feel we are the only chosen religion, we will not be a good fit. *But...*
- If you wish to protest, we pray you well and support your right to do so, just please respect others, the police officers who defend and protect us, and never cause damage to property or life. Do not allow the posting of demeaning images that harm the morality or devalue others.
- If you are Catholic, of any stripe, or any varied version of same, you are welcome here.
- If you are Protestant, Jewish, or Muslim or any other faith that honors and loves God – you, too, are welcome here.
- If you are unsure about God or His existence because of the hate the world sometimes produces, you are will find a place where that hatred does not exist and that only love abounds. Yes, you – *the seeker* – you are welcome here.
- If you wear a burka, a hajib, kufi or turban, we will not move our seats when you enter – here, or on a train, or in an airplane. We are your friends, your coworker, your companion.
- If you are disabled, we will accommodate whatever need you have to allow you the fullest access to our greatest ability.
- If you believe a little differently, it's ok! We will honor you and share our life with you here.

- If you are LGBTQ, your *home* is here, too, among us - fully as one of us.
- If you are exhausted, depressed, fighting addiction, or living with grief or fear - here is your respite; your sanctuary, your place of refuge. Here, we are your friends; friends to inspire, give hope, and just be with you for as long as you need us.

Here in this place there are no second classes citizens, there is no color, no expression, no separation, no limitation that we will not respect and celebrate, *except* intolerance and hatred.

So, to President-elect Trump we say stand firm and tall. Rise to the Office to which you are now elected. Do not fail us, not one of us. You must now be the President of *these* United States, and *all* of her inhabitants. We can disagree and still love on another unless our disagreement is rooted in oppression, hatred, the denial of another's humanity, their right to live free, or their civil rights.

And to all of you; I remind you that you are the future of this parish, our Church, and of this nation. Not the single, fallible man or woman who ever occupies the White House. Please, do not give them that sort of power over you, others, or the creation God has *made you* stewards of. You and your strength *will* prevail, as long as it is tempered with patience and the deep love of God and all the people God created, and as long as you have hope. Leonard Cohen once penned, "*So much of the world is plunged into darkness and chaos, so ring the bells that still can ring and forget your perfect offering; there is a crack in everything. That is how the light gets in!*"

I will end my words today in the most gracious and hospitable way that a servant of God should with a note of reconciliation, and finally the word of God. You may not always agree with all of the decisions that I make, or even the manner in which I guide this parish or my diocese, but I want you to know that I always have you at the center of my heart and you are at the heart of every decision; for I want nothing more than to make this parish - and your life - better. I want you to know the God that I have come to know: a God of love, hope, and inclusion. Please know that I take my responsibility as your shepherd seriously, so if I have ever failed you, I offer my deepest apology and I *will* try to do better.

At the end of the day, all of you are the most inspirational people I have known. Regardless of who you voted for because of you, your love, and your sacrifices we have created a place of harmony and peace *for all who wish to come*. Do not let the world, or the current secular circumstances we find ourselves in, rob you - or us - of that wonderful gift. There is a lesson in that dedication and in that expression of your love. One that can take all of us far beyond the walls *here* to the streets *out there*. You remain the most inspirational people to me, despite any trivial political or ideological differences we may have; and, at the risk of violating a copyright, you are always in *my* 'basket of adorables'!

And what kind of priest would I be if I did not end where I began by taking us full circle to the very word of God during a time when soon our own Church will enter into "*The Year of Love*": 'faith, hope, love; these three abide, but the greatest of these is love.'

In Christ and Mary,




The Right Reverend +James M. St. George, Bishop Ordinary