

Bishop Barnes Homily – 9-21-18

Good afternoon. I am Bishop Barnes from the Diocese of San Bernardino. And just in case you didn't hear, I am from Region XI. We are all delegates of a larger community that is contributing to the wellbeing of this great country and the growth of the Church. We carry within our veins the history and testimony of many races, cultures and nations. We are a mixed race. In other words, we are all blended together. White, Black, African, Indigenous, Indian and Arabic blood courses through our veins and we are proud of this combination that unites us all.

But we also have a unique identity. We are not a mass of people. We are a nation with a history, a common language and traditions, but above all with enormous faith and great love for the Church. We are here, continuing the path of so many committed lay people, religious, priests and bishops that broke new ground in Hispanic Ministry in the United States. In some regions this history includes several centuries of missionary work. In other cases, it is more recent. But in every place, we can remember the pioneers that sowed the seeds of the Gospel and have born fruit in us and those who come after us.

I would like to ask those who were present at I Encuentro to please stand; and the second, and the third, and the fourth. Thank you very much. It has been a history of joy and hope, but there have also been moments of struggle, of uncertainty and of discrimination. We cannot forget. It is part of our history. And now here we are at V Encuentro, full of joy, enthusiasm and hope because the communities have had their say and have committed themselves to action. The Parish, Diocesan and Regional Encuentros were opportunities to get to know each other, to listen to each other attentively and to pray together. We figured out that we learn what our mission is by being missionaries, that talking about what happens to us is the first step in announcing Christ, who is always by our side, and that along the way we hear other voices, the voices of those who normally go unheard either because they are poor or rich or black or white or simply because they lead a different lifestyle. They have also enriched what we are going to discuss and reflect on today.

Today's readings are very appropriate to kick off the V Encuentro. The motivation is profound. Respond to your vocation. Reread the words of St. Paul. I exhort you here and now to live a life worthy of the call you have received. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient and bear with one another through love. Make an effort to remain united in the Spirit, because that which unites us is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who reigns over all. He acts through everyone and lives in everyone.

These words are both ancient and current because they motivate us to build the Church by following values that will never change. The Hispanic Community in the United States is called to be an instrument of unity and a promoter of communion in the midst of all the other communities we live and share with. To speak of Hispanic Ministry is to speak of being a bridge, of promoting community development so everyone has the opportunity to grow, of becoming perfect people who achieve the fullness of Christ in all its dimensions.

The Gospel for the Feast of St. Matthew motivates us to respond to the call. It is not an organization or a priest or a bishop that calls us. It is Jesus himself who comes to encounter us at work, in our family, on the street, in the fields. He pushes us to continue on, bringing this same call to all those around us, especially those whom society has discriminated against, excluded and rejected. This is the message of the V Encuentro: to recover the vocation of being missionary disciples, bearers of hope and witnesses of the love of God for the ministers and for all the baptized. To achieve the miracle of Jesus when he called

Matthew. Change your mindset. Confront your erroneous ways of talking about God. Like Matthew, we have to assimilate the mission, focus on the mission and transform ourselves for the mission.

Jesus preaches this mission with actions that carry a profound message. To sit down with the excluded is proclaiming the Gospel right then and there. St. Paul in the first reading and Matthew in the Gospel remind us that the Spirit of God leads us to unity, that it is his transforming strength that makes us participants in the divine life, the Trinitarian life. That it is God himself who will perform his work through us and bring new life to each one of us. If we put our faith in his transforming action, if we invoke him with all of our hearts, if we prepare ourselves so that his grace can work in us, we will not be afraid to carry out the mission of the Church, because that is the only way we can truly purify it from within.

This day in age with all of its divisions, betrayals, and abuses of power, pushes us to confide more in the transforming strength of the Spirit and carry on. The prophetic voices of our brothers and sisters, whom we represent, resound in our hearts this very moment. I joyfully recall the Diocesan Encuentro of San Bernardino. I was shocked at how enthusiastically the young people voiced their opinions about the future of youth ministry, especially the young people that spoke very little or no Spanish, because they spoke Spanglish, but who feel and live out their culture. It thrills me to see all the groups show interest in responding to the needs of families. They passionately covered topics like higher education, the family, migrant ministry, and restorative justice. There was so much enthusiasm, just like surely there was in all the other dioceses throughout the country.

The Regional Encuentros, where the bishops listened to the people's reflections and worries, were times of grace and blessing. That is why now it behooves us to close this circle of reflection and begin to act. I invite you to live out this stage of the process with a lot of passion. We are here as ones who are sent, delegates, representatives of millions of Hispanic Catholics who struggle, live and work in this country and whose faith contributes to the richness of the Church. Let's not make them look bad. We express what we have heard in our dioceses and regions and we pay attention to what is said and discussed here in order to bring the message back to our brothers and sisters in our local communities.

We are like the first apostles and disciples who gathered in Jerusalem, sent out to all the communities to talk about what was essential to the Christian life and what wasn't. Now we too, the new apostles and disciples, in communion with my brother bishops, are in charge of invoking the Holy Spirit so that he might be present in this gathering, that he might help us bring the good news that is proclaimed here to those who have sent us.

May this supper of the Lord, this meal of love, renew our brotherhood, unity and friendship in order to strengthen our response to being missionary disciples, witnesses of the love of God. Let us cry out, "Sing out to Christ, the living Bread before us, O Love, beyond all love! Kneel before the Lord, whose death and resurrection we remember as selfless sacrifice. Glory and praise be to you, O God most Holy, let all creation exult and let all faithful hearts proclaim the story of Christ's redeeming love for humankind." Amen.