Homily — Closing Mass of V Encuentro

Most Reverend José H. Gomez  
Archbishop of Los Angeles

Grapevine, Texas  
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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Our Gospel reading today begins with these words: “Jesus and his disciples left from there and began a journey.”

This is our story, yours and mine. This is the story of the Church.

We are his disciples. That means that at some point in our lives, each one of us has come to know Jesus. How we came to find him — or how he found us — this is part of the story of our lives. And every story is different because every life is different.

What is true for all of us — is that this meeting with Jesus changed the direction of our lives. This encounter caused us to leave behind the past — and to begin a new journey with him.

That is why we are here today. And what a beautiful gift, the gift of faith! There is nothing more beautiful than finding Jesus and discovering the truth of his love — the truth that he gave his life for us on the cross; that he died and rose again to set us free to live in holiness and to become saints, the men and women that God created us to be.

Brothers and sisters, that is what this National Fifth Encuentro is all about.

Yes, the Encuentro is also about our identity and missionary responsibility as Latino Catholics in the United States. That is very important.

But more than anything, Encuentro is about the “encounter” with Jesus Christ. It is about realizing that we are disciples on a journey. It is about realizing that the meaning of our life is found in walking with Jesus and sharing in his mission of building his Kingdom.

Brothers and sisters, our lives are a part of something much greater than us.

Your journey is now joined to his. Your story is now part of the story of salvation, the journey of God’s people through history.

What started with Jesus and his disciples on those dusty roads in Galilee and Jerusalem, eventually made its way to Rome. And from there, the journey continue to the ends of the earth — reaching the peoples of Europe, Africa and Asia.
The Church’s journey continued to the Americas with the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico in 1531.

We all know that story. We learn it when we are children, we pass it on to our own little ones. It is a beautiful story of God’s tender love in history.

As we know, the Virgin entrusted St. Juan Diego with a mission — she sent him to go and tell the bishop to build a church for our Lord.

Think about that, my brothers and sisters: Jesus entrusted the mission of his Church in the New World to a lay person. Not to a priest or bishop. Not to the member of a religious order.

Jesus called a lay person to be first, to lead his mission in the Americas.

Brothers and sisters, you are the children of Guadalupe, Guadalupanos; you are the spiritual heirs of Juan Diego. The mission entrusted to him, is now entrusted to you.

My brothers and sisters, I believe that this moment in the Church — is the hour of the laity. It is the time for saints.

In the spirit of St. Juan Diego, I believe our Lord is calling each of you to “go to the bishops.” He is calling the lay faithful to work together with the bishops to renew and rebuild his Church. Not only in this country, but throughout the continents of the Americas.

This is your great responsibility in this moment. But we need to remember that leadership in the Church is not like leadership in a government or a corporation.

That is what Jesus is talking about today in the Gospel.

It is interesting, isn’t it? Jesus is teaching them, but the apostles still don’t “get it.” Instead they start arguing over their own privileges, fighting over which of them is the greatest. That scene in the Gospel today may be the first beginnings of clericalism in the Church.

We know that is not what Jesus wants. St. James says in the second reading, there is no room in the Church — no room in the heart of any Christian — for “jealousy and selfish ambition.”

Brothers and sisters, you are being called to lead — not through the desire for power. You are called to lead by your holiness. True unity in the Church will only come about if every one of us — clergy and laity — is striving to be holy as God is holy.

Holiness means self-denial and sacrifice for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel. Holiness is giving up our own desires in order to follow Jesus and to do the will of God. Holiness is love that comes to serve, as Jesus came to serve.

Our Lord tells us today: “If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.”
As we know, in a few weeks we are going to have a new saint of the Americas — a new Latino saint! Pope Francis is going to canonize Blessed Oscar Romero, the holy bishop of San Salvador.

Not long before his martyrdom, Monseñor Romero said in one his homilies: “Ask yourselves, sisters and brothers: Where is the full realization of my life? Where does the Lord want me? We all have a vocation. We all have a place in history. Let us seek our happiness by always asking what God desires of us.”

Sisters and brothers, these powerful words are now addressed to us. Our Lord is calling each of you to listen for his voice, to seek his will for your lives; to take your place in the history of salvation, and to do your part for the mission of his Church.

Let us ask St. Oscar Romero, the holy bishop, and St. Juan Diego, the holy lay person, to be our guides and inspiration in this time of trial in the Church.

As you know, when he first met the Mother of God, Juan Diego protested. He said he was not powerful enough or holy enough to carry out the mission she was asking.

And of course, we remember those words that Our Lady spoke to him. She said: “I have many messengers who I could send to deliver my message. But it is absolutely necessary that you yourself go.”

Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ has a message that he wants you to deliver with your lives. And it is absolutely necessary that you yourself go to deliver it.

So, let us go always forward with confidence. Let us be men and women of encuentro! May each of us lead many people to their own beautiful encounter with Jesus Christ.

And may Our Lady of Guadalupe go with us on our journey as disciples of Jesus.

May she help us to be holy and to be heroes and healers. These times demand it. And this is what we are made for.

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¹ Readings (25th Sunday in Ordinary Time); Wisd. 2:12, 17–20; Ps. 53:3–6, 8; James 3:16–4:3; Mark 9:30–37.