

VESPERS - 7pm - March 14, 2018

Cathedral of the Annunciation, Stockton

This evening, as I stood knocking on the doors of this cathedral, anticipating the gracious welcome of crossing the threshold into this sacred space, I was first handed a crucifix. Upon receiving the image of Our Crucified Lord, I then, kissed it. In doing so, I was reminded of my sinfulness, & my need of the divine mercy of Jesus. As I held that thought, it was consoling to hear the words: "It pleased God to make absolute fullness reside in him &, by means of him, to reconcile everything in his person, making peace through the blood of his cross."

Immediately, after kissing the crucifix, I was presented with Holy Water. I preceded to bless myself, & then sprinkled those around me. This became an opportunity to recall, that as I entered this place of worship, I did so as a baptized individual. Each time we dip our finger into the holy water font, we are to recall our baptism & the day our parents, godparents & family had us immersed in the death & resurrection of Jesus & became members of the Body of Christ, the Church. At this evening prayer, we have been reminded: "He has rescued us from the power of darkness & through him, we have the forgiveness of our sins."

It is by way of the baptismal call that the Holy Spirit reveals to us our vocation. Mine, to the priesthood, to the episcopacy, & now, here, as one to be installed as your Bishop. It is all God's doing! It is all God's hand working in our lives. God is so good &, without a doubt, he is a God of "surprises."

This graciousness of God's surprises was evident, 4yrs ago on March 25, 2014, at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, when His Excellency, Bishop Jaime Soto, ordained me as the Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese Sacramento - it was the Feast of the Annunciation. Now, this evening, having been welcomed, I stand before you, in this Cathedral of the Annunciation, & to know that this diocese is under the protection of Our Lady of the Annunciation as its patroness, is a blessing & comfort to me. Our Lady is never far from us. As a bishop, I must never forget it! She has been intimately involved throughout my "journey of the call." It has been a blessed relationship, one which was "seeded" by the faith of my grandparents & family.

Our Lady's call, & her response at the Annunciation, is our model of discipleship & service. The Magnificat, says it all: "I am the handmaid of the Lord." "He has done good things for me & holy is his name." This evening we will be reminded of the Magnificat of Our Lady; & as it is the Lenten Season, we have a graced opportunity to renew our "fiat." For us, as we anticipate tomorrow's installation, & together praying the Magnificat, it is perfect timing for all of us to renew & reflect on what it means to be "called" & "sent."

In being called & sent, we hear in scripture, how the Blessed Virgin of Nazareth had a profound encounter with an angel who delivered the message from heaven that she had been chosen & invited to be the mother of the Savior. I too had a profound encounter with a messenger in regard to this call & special appointment. It did not come with the glorious appearance of the Archangel Gabriel, but it came through the voice of an Archbishop, the Papal Nuncio, His Excellency, Christophe Pierre - a call received on my cellphone. Our times, & our means of communication have definitely changed!

The humbling experience of being called & appointed - first as Auxiliary Bishop, & now, as Diocesan Bishop of Stockton, became a reality because of His Holiness, Pope Francis, the Successor of St. Peter to whom I am humbly grateful. It is an honor to have received the message delivered by his messenger, his representative, the Papal Nuncio.

In conclusion, during this evening, we have heard Paul's Letter to the Philippians that we are called to "work with anxious concern to achieve your salvation." It is God who, in his good will toward you, begets in you any measure of desire or achievement. We are reminded: "In everything you do, act without grumbling or arguing; prove yourselves(ourselves) innocent & straightforward, children of God without reproach in the midst of a crooked & perverse generation, among whom you shine like lights in the world."

As we work together for the sake of the kingdom, we are challenged to do so with the right disposition. Knowing, & reminding one another, that all this desire to serve originates from God, himself, & for his glory, not ours'. As proclaimed in this evening's Canticle: "It is He (Jesus) who is head of the body, the Church." We are to work in union with him; & then we will experience joy; because true joy comes from Jesus. We are to share the Good News, as Pope Francis reminds us: "All the Lord's disciples are called to nurture this joy, the joy of evangelization." His Holiness States: "The Gospel is demanding: It demands to be lived radically & sincerely. It needs to be "lived out." May we work together as his people, & "live out" the Gospel within the Diocese of Stockton.

"O God, who delights in innocence & restore it, direct the hearts of your servants to yourself, that, caught up in the fire of your Spirit, we, the people of the Diocese of Stockton, may be found steadfast in faith & effective in works." Amen.

Our Lady of the Annunciation, pray for us.