

## ***The Joy from the Cross***

Homily for the First Anniversary Mass of Frs. Jesús Alatorre, Cesar Izquierdo and Jesús Mariscal  
at St. Paul Cathedral, Yakima, Washington

with readings from Friday of the Thirteenth Week of Ordinary Time

*Genesis 23:1-4, 19; 24:1-8, 62-67; Matthew 9:9-13*

Most Reverend Joseph J. Tyson, Bishop of Yakima

Peace be with you! What a joy to celebrate your first anniversary as priests. How good it is to keep the joy of that ordination alive with your ordination still fresh in your memories and in your hearts. What a coincidence that the daily mass readings you selected align back to the call of Jesus to St. Matthew.

We are all familiar with the famous painting by Caravaggio titled the call of St. Matthew. I posted a copy of the famous painting along with today's homily on our Facebook as well as our diocesan web site, so you all look at it tonight. But there with the Caravaggio's famous "chiaroscuro" interplay of light and dark we quite literally see Jesus calling St. Matthew out of darkness into the light.

An interesting detail in today's Gospel is that St. Matthew is called by Jesus while working at the "customs post." Caravaggio's painting suggests that this "customs post" job involves a lot of idle time. Note well: In Caravaggio's painting, Jesus calls St. Matthew while sitting at the table with his coworkers at the "custom's post." Money is clearly present. And while others notice the finger of Jesus pointing at St. Matthew, St. Matthew himself has his eyes downward on the table counting the small change. Yet Jesus call him from the table of small change to the Eucharistic table of discipleship.

This is how Jesus calls you, too.

Indeed, on the day of your ordination, and unique to the ordination mass, I received the gifts of bread and wine. Then handing them to you I said:

***Receive the oblation of the holy people to be offered to God. Understand what you do, imitate what you celebrate and conform your life to the mystery of the Lord's Cross.***

Permit me to start with that final phrase: "...the mystery of the Lord's Cross." I have been ordained for thirty years. Nearly half of that time – fourteen years – I have been a bishop. Border posts and custom zones – even today – have become places of darkness and sin. Underage children caged at the borders. Families fleeing from the violence of gangs and drug cartels. Human trafficking. Men and women wanting to fulfill their natural law obligations to support their children and provide a better life. As a pastor, it is heartbreaking to hear the struggles of our families facing complex immigration procedures, deportation orders and family separation. It is painful to hear leaders make generalizations about so many of our immigrants that I have come to know and love as brothers and sisters in our Catholic faith.

A few years back, when visiting Tzintzuntzan, Mexico – not far from Morelia Michoacán, I bought a huge rough wood cross with a corpus of Jesus nailed and in agony. It hangs in my living room. I place much of what I think and feel before that crucifix. I have come to know that when I receive the gifts of bread and wine, I am also receiving the joys and the sorrows of those I serve. I receive heartbreaking stories and situations that I cannot resolve. I can only place them alongside the bread and wine. I can only place them before the cross. Perhaps this is how, day by day we “celebrate and conform” our lives to the mystery of the Lord’s Cross.

In his famous work, “Cur Deus Homo” St. Anselm answers the hard question his young student, Boso, poses about the death of Jesus. Boso does not simply ask why Jesus had to die. No. Young Boso wants to know why Jesus had to die this way: tortured to death and crucified. St. Anselm’s answer is very telling: “You have not considered the gravity of sin.”

In other words, this horrific death of Jesus on the cross gives us a dark assurance that not one single corner of the universe escapes the salvific power of Jesus Christ. By suffering such an excruciatingly painful death, Jesus takes on all of the world’s sin, all of the world’s suffering, all of the world’s injustices, and all of the world’s dark dysfunctions. He even descends into hell. Even the darkest corners of hell receive the radical offer of salvation accomplished by the cross of Christ.

The noted Christian Anthropologist, Gil Bailie, when speaking to high school students once suggested that Jesus dies in a bloody big screen production, so we don’t have to live in one. The problem is not that this crucifixion of Jesus failed to be efficacious. The problem is that we act like it never happened. We continue our gang banging and violence. We look away when we see the human dignity of children robbed at our border. We turn away from darkness of unwanted children lost through abortion. We minimize the adult sexual misconduct against agricultural workers in our packing plants and orchards. We maintain a blind eye at injustice. Interiorly we self-justify our own sins. Like St. Matthew in Caravaggio’s famous painting, we keep our eyes down. We focus on the small change.

Yet at the Eucharist the oblation of the holy people we receive includes all of their lives: the good and the bad. All of this we offer to God in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is as though in Caravaggio’s painting, we shift positions. We move away from the customs table counting our money. As priests, we join Jesus at his side as one of his disciples. We become an “Alter Christus,” imaging for those we serve – especially the poorest and most oppressed – the very presence of Christ.

No. We cannot solve the injustices of the world on our own. No. We cannot take away the suffering and sorrow so many of our families face. But we can bring them the joy of the gospel. We can feed them with the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. We can nourish them with Christ himself. We can give them the hope and assurance that whatever they face they are not alone, and that no injustice and no oppression can steal from them the joy of being a follower of Jesus.

As the famous moral theologian, Fr. Servais Pinckaers notes in his book on the Beatitudes: “We need no teachers to tell us that good fortune and joy will make us happy. But what we could never have discovered for ourselves is that poverty and suffering could be the most direct road to happiness and that Christ has chosen them as our way to the Kingdom. This is a paradox well worth proclaiming from mountaintops.”

Brothers, thank you for proclaiming the joy of the Gospel from the mountaintops. Thank you for seeing suffering and poverty as the unique pathway that leads you and those you serve most directly to Christ. Thank you for accepting the high call to be good and holy priests of God. Congratulations on your first anniversary as priests. May God lead you to many more years of this unique happiness. Peace be with you!