



WEEKLY MEMO from BMW

Date: March 13, 2015
From: Bishop Michael W. Warfel
To: Clergy, Religious, Lay Ecclesial Ministers et al

Day of Prayer for Priests prior to the Chrism Mass: “Creating a Culture of Encounter with Jesus in Solidarity as Disciples, Preachers and Servants” facilitated by Fr. John Hurley. The location is St. Patrick’s Co-cathedral. The day will begin at 9:00 AM and conclude with a Holy Hour from 3:00 PM to 4:00 PM which will provide adequate time for all to have an early dinner before the Chrism Mass at 6:00 PM. A simple lunch will be provided on site.

Upcoming Pastoral Visitations: St. Raphael Parish, Glasgow for Mass at 11:00 AM on March 15th (The parish is having a special day to celebrate families); St. Anthony Parish, Culbertson from March 27th through 29th.

On Friday evening, March 27th at 7:30 PM (following their Friday Fish Fry) I will be giving a presentation at St. Anthony’s on *Stewarding the Gift of Faith: the Lifestyle of a Disciple*. On Saturday, March 28th from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM, I will be offering a day retreat on *The Sorrowful Mysteries*. Area parishioners are invited to attend these. On Palm Sunday, I will celebrate Mass at 9:30 AM followed by a parish Listening Session.

There will be a Priest’s Council conference call on March 17, 2015 scheduled from 10 AM to Noon. The agenda will be forthcoming prior to the meeting.

This coming week, I will be in Chicago for a meeting with the Bishop’s Committee for Ecumenical and Inter-religious Dialogue. The meeting is held at the Lutheran Center, headquarters for the ELCA.

Last year, the Holy See issued a set of guidelines for the Homily that drew heavily from the thought of Pope Francis and his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. While I haven’t seen the final published text yet, I do have a copy that I ran off from the bishop’s site. I offer a couple snippets of wisdom from the guidelines for those of us who do preach a homily regularly:

“Because the homily is an integral part of the liturgy, it is not only an instruction, it is also an act of worship....It is because the homily is an integral part of the Church’s worship that it is to be delivered only by bishops, priests, or deacons.”

“Pope Francis observes that the homily ‘is distinctive genre, since it is preaching situated within the framework of the liturgical celebration; hence it should be brief and avoid taking on the semblance of a speech or lecture’ (EG 138).

“It might be helpful to say what the homily is not. It is not a sermon on an abstract topic;...Nor is the homily simply an exercise in biblical exegesis;...the homily is not catechetical instruction;...the time for the homily should not be taken up with the preacher’s personal witness... As Pope Francis warns, preaching that is purely moralistic, doctrinaire, or simply a lecture on biblical exegesis detracts from the heart-to-heart communication which should take place in the homily...”

“this does not mean that topical themes, biblical exegesis, doctrinal instruction, and personal witness have no place in preaching; indeed, they can be effective *elements* in a good homily... Like fire, all of these things make good servants but poor masters: if they serve the purpose of the homily, they are good; if they take the place of the homily, they are not.”

When I receive a published text, I'll let all know where they may obtain it.

Final plans are being made for Pope Francis’ visit to the United States. Though not finalized as yet, it appears that the Administrative Committee on which I serve, will act as an official welcoming group of bishops. This means I’ll be going to Washington DC a bit earlier than I had planned but it will be a trip well worth it.

Pope Francis announces a Year of Mercy. See below:

(Vatican Radio) Pope Francis presided over a penance service in St. Peter's Basilica on Friday afternoon, during which he announced an extraordinary Jubilee dedicated to Divine Mercy. Below, please find Vatican Radio's English translation of the Holy Father's homily, in which he made the announcement.

This year as last, as we head into of the Fourth Sunday of Lent, we are gathered to celebrate the penitential liturgy. We are united with so many Christians, who, in every part of the world, have accepted the invitation to live this moment as a sign of the goodness of the Lord. The Sacrament of Reconciliation, in fact, allows us with confidence to draw near to the Father, in order to be certain of His pardon. He really is “rich in mercy” and extends His mercy with abundance over those who turn to Him with a sincere heart.

To be here in order to experience His love, however, is first of all the fruit of His grace. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, God never ceases to show the richness of His mercy throughout the ages. The transformation of the heart that leads us to confess our sins is “God's gift”, it is “His work” (cf. Eph 2:8-10). To be touched with tenderness by His hand and shaped by His grace allows us, therefore, to approach the priest without fear for our sins, but with the certainty of being welcomed by him in the name of God, and understood notwithstanding our miseries. Coming out of the confessional, we will feel God’s strength, which restores life and returns the enthusiasm of faith.

The Gospel we have heard (cf. Lk 7:36-50) opens for us a path of hope and comfort. It is good that we should feel that same compassionate gaze of Jesus upon us, as when he perceived the sinful woman in the house of the Pharisee. In this passage two words return before us with great insistence: *love* and *judgment*.

There is the love of the sinful woman, who humbles herself before the Lord; but first there is the merciful love of Jesus for her, which pushes her to approach. Her cry of repentance and joy washes the feet of the Master, and her hair dries them with gratitude; her kisses are pure expression of her affection; and the fragrant ointment poured out with abundance attests how precious He is to her eyes. This woman’s every gesture speaks of love and expresses her desire to have an unshakeable

certainty in her life: that of being forgiven. And Jesus gives this assurance: welcoming her, He demonstrates God's love for her, just for her! Love and forgiveness are simultaneous: God forgives her much, everything, because "she loved much" (Luke 7:47); and she adores Jesus because she feels that in Him there is mercy and not condemnation. Thanks to Jesus, God casts her many sins away behind Him, He remembers them no more (cf. Is 43:25). For her, a new season now begins; she is reborn in love, to a new life.

This woman has really met the Lord. In silence, she opened her heart to Him; in pain, she showed repentance for her sins; with her tears, she appealed to the goodness of God for forgiveness. For her, there will be no judgment except that which comes from God, and this is the judgment of mercy. The protagonist of this meeting is certainly the love that goes beyond justice.

Simon the Pharisee, on the contrary, *cannot find the path of love*. He stands firm upon the threshold of formality. He is not capable of taking the next step to go meet Jesus, who brings him salvation. Simon limited himself to inviting Jesus to dinner, but did not really welcome Him. In his thoughts, he invokes only justice, and in so doing, he errs. *His judgment on the woman distances him from the truth* and does not allow him even to understand who guest is. He stopped at the surface, he was not able to look to the heart. Before Jesus' parable and the question of which a servant would love his master most, the Pharisee answered correctly, "The one, to whom the master forgave most." And Jesus does not fail to make him observe: "Thou hast judged rightly. (Lk 7:43)" Only when the judgment of Simon is turned toward love: then is he in the right.

The call of Jesus pushes each of us never to stop at the surface of things, especially when we are dealing with a person. We are called to look beyond, to focus on the heart to see how much generosity everyone is capable. No one can be excluded from the mercy of God; everyone knows the way to access it and the Church is *the house that welcomes all and refuses no one*. Its doors remain wide open, so that those who are touched by grace can find the certainty of forgiveness. The greater the sin, so much the greater must be the love that the Church expresses toward those who convert.

Dear brothers and sisters, I have often thought about how the Church might make clear its mission of being a witness to mercy. It is journey that begins with a spiritual conversion. For this reason, I have decided to call an *extraordinary Jubilee* that is to have the mercy of God at its center. It shall be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live this Year in the light of the Lord's words: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (cf. Lk 6:36)"

This Holy Year will begin on this coming Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and will end on November 20, 2016, the Sunday dedicated to Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe – and living face of the Father's mercy. I entrust the organization of this Jubilee to the Pontifical Council for Promotion of the New Evangelization, that [the dicastery] might animate it as a new stage in the journey of the Church on its mission to bring to every person the Gospel of mercy.

I am convinced that the whole Church will find in this Jubilee the joy needed to rediscover and make fruitful the mercy of God, with which all of us are called to give consolation to every man and woman of our time. From this moment, we entrust this Holy Year to the Mother of Mercy, that she might turn her gaze upon us and watch over our journey.

At the Administrative Committee meeting this week, we issued the following statement on religious persecution in the Middle East:

**STATEMENT ON RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION
ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE**

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

March 10, 2015

Upon learning of the death of 21 Coptic Christians at the hands of ISIL terrorists, Pope Francis called their murder a "testimony which cries out to be heard." On behalf of America's Catholic Bishops, we pause to listen and invite people of all faiths to join us in prayer for those facing the stark reality of religious persecution in the Middle East and elsewhere. The testimony of those 21 brave and courageous martyrs does not stand alone as thousands of families – Christian and other religions – find themselves fleeing from horrific violence.

We urge all people of goodwill to work toward protections of the marginalized and persecuted. In union with the local Churches and the Holy See, we call upon our nation to: work with the international community to intervene and protect the rights of religious minorities and civilians within the framework of international and humanitarian law; address political and economic exclusion that are exploited by extremists; and increase humanitarian and development assistance.

Lent is a season to meditate upon the Cross and unite ourselves even more closely with Christ's suffering. Let us use this season to unite with our suffering brothers and sisters and pray for them and with them in a special way. With hope, let us pray for the day when we can all share in the joy and lasting peace of Christ's resurrection.