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SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST A.D. 2017

HOLY GHOST PARISH, KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE

*(speaking notes)*

On Friday afternoon, I was watching the thunderstorms gather over Knoxville, huge dark towers of black cloud. On the Internet there was a warning of imminent downpours, damaging hail, and lightning strikes. To a European it all sounded rather biblical as though Knoxville was about to experience an Old Testament deluge, but to the residents of Tennessee it was probably just another hot and humid summer's afternoon.

As we look beyond Knoxville this morning out into to the wider world, it might well seem that there are storms of a different sort gathering. This week, after more than a hundred years in operation, London Underground in England, decided to drop 'Ladies and Gentlemen' from its public address system. Instead all public addresses, will use the term "everyone" to avoid offending transgendered persons. This move was of course tacitly approved of by the global media, but it was one which I personally found a bit puzzling. God created us male and female, which after all is a core concept of our idea of Christian identity.

Moving a bit further afield in my home diocese of Sydney, Australia, we are preparing ourselves for the criminal trial of the former Cardinal Archbishop, His Eminence George Pell, who incidentally, admitted me to the seminary, and so I owe him my vocation. The Cardinal, now Pope Francis's

treasury secretary has been relentlessly hounded by the Australian media for years. Why? Because he refused to bow to the voices calling for same-sex marriage, liberal abortion regimes and euthanasia. The Cardinal Pell I know, and I know His Eminence very well, is one of the finest human beings I have ever met.

And here in the United States, there appears to be a relentless effort to polarise the Church by your media – trying divide us into groupings such as liberal and conservative, or traditional and progressive Catholics. The old saying certainly applies here – divide and conquer. One of the most disappointing and perhaps unforeseen aspects of the period following the Second Vatican Council has certainly been the divisions that have appeared in the Church. The word devil in the Greek is *διαβολος*, the one who divides, and the enemies of the Church are trying to drive a wedge between us, setting mother against father, brother against sister, Catholic against Catholic and it's a movement that we really must be on our guard against every day. Now more than ever Catholics need to pull together. There has *never* been in the history of the Church such a thing as a conservative catholic religion or a liberal Catholic religion. Either we are believing, practising Catholics, or we are not. There isn't a menu of options for us to choose from. Some of our doctrine is unpopular to 21<sup>st</sup> century secular appetites. That is nothing new. From the time of the first Christians we have been a sign of contradiction in a hostile world. We were the people who would not sacrifice to the *cultus deorum* of ancient Rome! We were the people who would not burn incense to Jupiter! We were

the people who were thrown to the lions for refusing to participate in the ungodly excesses of the Roman Empire. Two thousand years ago – the mantra was ‘Oh you Christians, why do you have to cause such a fuss? It’s just a bit of incense. Throw it on the fire and we can all get on our with our lives.’ Today it is, “Oh you Catholics, it’s just a little abortion. Why must you be so difficult?...”

But the hostile world is outside. This morning we are sitting inside a fortress, in this beautiful church, and in this morning’s introit, we have just heard the choir sing that the Lord is the protector of His peoples and the safeguard of their salvation. In the Collect we have asked the Lord to grant us an increase of True religion - the Catholic religion, not liberal or conservative Catholicism, just Catholicism, as it always has been, preserved and passed on, through the Mass, down through the centuries.

Today’s Gospel has one of the best known of all of the miracles, the feeding of the multitude. I think what is truly striking about it is that a bit like the marriage at Cana, it is a miracle that has nothing to do with human suffering. Our Lord is quite simply concerned for the people around him. That they are hungry and faint, and he is worried about that. And so he performs the miracle, and as with all his miracles there is a lesson for us in it. What is that lesson? His disciples, as usual, miss the point of the lesson. *They* are taken in by the political potential of the miracle. Healings and exorcisms are all very well, but feed 5,000 people in the middle of nowhere... well that could be the start of something huge.

If He can feed 5,000 why not 10,000 why not an army of 50,000 all being fed on miraculous bread, an army that could expel the Roman troops occupying Jerusalem and so restore the Kingdom of Israel. They get so carried away by the miracle, they miss the lesson. This miracle, the feeding of the multitude, is indeed a foreshadowing of the Eucharist, the feeding of all people from the altars of the world with the bread of life. But that's not the lesson. The lesson behind it is kindness. Simple human kindness. And I think that if we are going to start to heal the divisions with the Church today, recovering kindness is one of the first things we need to do. Kindness, acts of considerate generosity.

Cardinal Burke commented at some point that Catholics who attend the Traditional Mass are some of the best catechised, most faithful, most generous members that the Church has. We have kept intact the treasures of the Roman Church – the Mass, Latin, Gregorian chant, the Rosary – and they are treasures. Everything that is needed to unify the Church again is present at Holy Ghost parish this morning. Yes we are sitting in a fortress, but outside it is getting dark, and massive damage is being inflicted on the Church.

I think most of us realise that we are living in a cultural battlefield – it is littered with the remains of Catholics who have left the Church. Now people don't just leave the Church for no reason. Usually one of two things has occurred – the first is that they have been offended by a priest, the second, more often is that they have placed themselves – or nowadays they have been pressured by society and the media, into a place where they disagree with some

key teaching of the Church – be that marriage and divorce, the ordination of women, or questions of life. From there it is only a few short steps to renouncing the Catholic faith.

These people are our brethren, they are the walking wounded, and they are *so* wounded, that they take a pride in their illness - even taking titles to themselves like liberal Catholic – as if that were a badge of honour. It is not a badge of honour. It is the Spirit of Protestantism and it's source is the one who divides, the *διαβολος*. Everything that those people want is here, in this Mass, but they are so spiritually starved, they simply cannot see it.

As followers of Jesus we can't just sit in our fortress. We have to go out to meet them where they are, we have to go out into that battlefield, and fight for them. And the first weapon in that fight is kindness. I know that sounds strange. But the reality is our lost brothers and sisters are so ill, so starved, that if we try to bring them the solid food of correct doctrine and rich tradition, they will either refuse it or vomit it back up. Before they can be given that solid food, they are in need of the milk of human kindness, and it is up to us to give it to them. A kind word, a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, basic human understanding and compassion that flows from the graces we receive at this altar. That is where we must start. But not where we must finish. After an act of kindness, or a series of acts of kindness, a kind disposition, can come an invitation, come back the Church of your youth, come back to the Church of the centuries, come home.

I'll finish with this. Every battlefield has its dangers, and the current one is no different. We need protection from the spiritual backlash that occurs when we try to go and rescue our wounded. 766 years ago today in an apparition to St Simon Stock at Cambridge, the Blessed Virgin gave to the Church the brown scapular. I cannot urge you strongly enough if you have not been invested in the brown scapular to do so at the first opportunity. St Dominic prophesied that with the rosary and the scapular Our Lady will save the world. The scapular is a great protection against the influence and attacks of the Evil Spirit in all his forms. We all need that protection, we need it even more if we are going to leave here and head out into that battlefield.

The situation of the Church may seem dire, it may seem that the barque of Peter is taking on water, and that the gathering thunderclouds might release a storm that will finally sink it. That is not going to happen, and those thoughts are temptations from the evil one, to take away our peace. No, Our Lord, who was so concerned about a relatively small thing such as people going hungry on a long journey home. He will not abandon us in the big things. He has built us a fortress and here we are safe. But He desires that all our Catholic brethren be brought within these walls and be fed at His table. And so with prayer, perseverance, trust in Him, and kindness, with the rosary as our weapon and the scapular as our shield, our parishes will flourish once more. And we know this to be true, because Our Lord, and Our Lady, have promised us that it will be so.

*Laudetur Iesus Christus*