

Remarks by Rev. Michael W. Davis

Faculty/Staff Day of Recollection,

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Morning Star Retreat House, Pinecrest.

As I begin, let me share with you the words of Jesus found in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 28: "Go out and teach all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

This is known as the great commission.

We are all on a mission, as missionary disciples. It is NOT mission impossible.

One of my favorite ecclesial leaders from the 20th century was Archbishop Oscar Romero. The archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador who was assassinated, one day, following the celebration of Mass. He was clearly a man of the people. Clearly understood the mission of the church, and understood his own mission. He spoke with conviction about everyone's responsibility in the mission of the Church.

Among his famous quotes he said, "the Church is all of you."

In this light, we are all very important. We are all very needed. We all have a tremendous responsibility.

When Pope Francis recently visited Genoa, Italy this past June, he challenged his hearers at Mass to learn to look at the landscape of their lives with "new eyes."

In our contemporary world, we must look at everything in a new way.

"The missionary experience," said the Pope, "opens our eyes and hearts. We must be sure to look with the heart, so as to never become mere tourists in life."

Are we living our lives on mission, or are we mere tourists, as we journey?

While I was on vacation to the big island of Hawaii, I had the opportunity to take a helicopter ride over its large active volcano. The rest of my fellow passengers were taking pictures; I chose to look, see, and experience the moment. The danger in taking pictures, while on vacation, is that we focus on the picture taking, and miss the whole experience.

The pope reminds us, "we must not be like those who take pictures of everything, and yet look at nothing." If our life is playing the tourist, we will only be looking at the photographs, and not experience the rich reality of life."

As people entrusted with a serious responsibility and commitment to life, as we are at the Church of the Little Flower and its treasured Saint Theresa School, we must rediscover our mission, to prepare us and help us to be more sensitive, more attentive, and to look at the landscape of our lives with more attention, appreciating the detail, yes, even the deeper meaning and purpose of our day, of our lives.

Mission can teach us to look at life with new eyes; it brings us closer to the hearts of many people.

Mission is not only “my” decision. The pope says, “there is another. One who sends me. You cannot do a mission without being sent.” In our case, in the ministry of education and pastoral service, we cannot do our mission without being sent by Jesus.

It is Jesus himself who sends you. It is Jesus who urges you to the mission. And, he is there beside you.

Jesus who works in your hearts, alters your view, and lets you look at life with new eyes, “not with the eyes of a tourist.”

We cannot do anything, of course, without love. Our work and ministry here has a focus that is much more than simply the pursuit of job satisfaction. The pope reminds us, “love gives life. In order for one’s mission to succeed, there must be divine love at the core of our lives. Otherwise, our lives, our work will simply be an adventure, a sight-seeing tour.” May we walk our path, embracing our mission, with love.

Pope Francis challenges us to help others; give alms to the poor.

“Loving means having the capacity to shake the dirty hand, wipe away tears, and to look into the eyes of those who are in a degraded situation” and to say, “for me, you are Jesus.”

It is not mission impossible. To be missionary, one must offer love, but also be obstinate in hope, especially towards those who have succumbed to addiction or violence.

“Jesus is there waiting. He is there with you. He never leaves us.”

Sadly, we are residents of an empty contemporary culture, a culture of solitude. Inside, we are all alone, and we need a noisy racket, so that we don’t feel the emptiness from pursuing the wrong things, from living as a tourist, rather than living a life with a mission. Mission leads us to togetherness, solidarity. Mission works against the isolation of loneliness.

Remember Matthew 28:18 “Go therefore....”

If there is anything that destroys our cities, causes violence, breaks down the human community, it is this isolation, which includes a very individualistic, limited view of life.

To go on mission is to help bring others out of isolation, and to make communities, fraternities.

Team work makes the dream work! Can we work together, in greater solidarity and dialogue to make the dream work?

This kind of mission is laden with the power to connect heaven and earth. The Kingdom of God is about bringing people together, binding wounds, healing sin and division, curing social isolation, bring people out of the darkness of loneliness into a vibrant community of life and love. Jesus is truly with us and for us as we embrace his mission, and act in his name. In Hebrews it says that he always lives to make intercession for us. He wants our success. He wants us to accomplish our life's task, our God-given mission.

Jesus also gave the capacity to intercede to us, to intercede, to pray for everyone. Do I pray? Do we exercise this power of intercession by bringing people and situations to God?

Sadly, we are always living between the rushing about and the things that are to be done. Admittedly, busyness can sweep us away. We can become lost, withdrawn into ourselves, and anxious over nothing.

In a world where there are no mountains, even mole hills can become mountains.

Pope Francis reminds us that "in order to avoid being drowned by this pain of living as tourist, let us remember to drop anchor in God everyday."

"Christian prayer is not a way of being more at peace with ourselves, centering and channeling, or find some inner harmony. Rather, we pray in order to take everything to God," to entrust the world to him, to reconnect with the mission, with the divine plan. Prayer is intercession; it is not tranquility; it is not communing with nature and hugging trees. "Prayer is charity. It is asking, seeking, knocking. It is putting ourselves on the line to intercede for the other." It is not mission impossible. We need to be mission driven. We need to be prayer empowered. Prayer is the power which move the world forward. Prayer grounds us in our mission, and brings peace.

It is not a power to dominate, or cry more loudly, according to the logic of this broken, divided, competitive world. Rather, exercising the gentle power of prayer which can even end wars and bring about peace.

As prayerful missionary disciples, he sends us forth, despite our shortcomings. He knows we will never be perfect, and that if we wait to become better in order to evangelize and embrace the mission of the Gospel, we will never begin. We will always see ourselves as unworthy.

"The Gospel can never be locked up, sealed off, because God's love is dynamic, and seeks to reach everyone." (cf. Pope Francis, speech at Genoa).

It is necessary to go out, to go beyond ourselves.

With the Lord, we cannot be calm and comfortable with our world. Given the needs, given what we see, when could we ever be content and satisfied? Not even our nostalgic recollections of the past will suffice.

With him, we are forbidden to lull ourselves into complacency or acquired confidence.

We must be careful of the temptation of being satisfied once we are doing well. , or we perceive to have everything under control.

Going out into the world is part of the Christian identity. It is not only for priests, nuns, or consecrated religious.

It is our identity. We are on a mission. Not an impossible one. Our identity is that we go into the world with the Lord, apply our faith, build up the human family and build the kingdom of God.

Christians are not stationary, but on a journey, with the Lord, toward others.

However, let's be clear. The pope tells us that "Christians are not sprinters, running madly or wildly through life, conquerors who must arrive before others. Rather, Christians are pilgrims, missionaries, hopeful marathon runners, meek but decisive in walking and trusting and, at the same time, active, creative, but always respectful, resourceful, and open, hard-working and supportive. Let us walk the roads of the world in this manner, as missionary disciples, sent out to teach, inspire, and transform in the name of Christ." We are not tourists. We have a mission to connect heaven and earth. The Lord is waiting to be known today, not through our strength, but rather through his. Not with the strength of the world, but with the gentle strength of a joyful, Gospel witness.

Saint Francis of Assisi once said, preach all the time, and if you need to, use words.

Christ is always are strength, the strength and impetus to be sent forth, the courage of the journey, the love that inspires.

May we have eyes to see; we are missionary disciples. It is not mission impossible!