

## **Homily for the 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

I know that more than a few of you have been following Pope Francis's apostolic visit to the United States, which concludes in Philadelphia today with the closing Mass of the World Meeting of Families. Since probably all of us here today will not be going to that Mass, we will be having our final family event here this afternoon. From 1 to 3pm in the church, we'll have a time of Eucharistic Adoration and prayer. Following this, we'll move down to the social hall for some refreshments and prepare to watch on our big screen TV the papal Mass on the Ben Franklin Parkway, which begins at 4pm. You're all invited and encouraged to come for all or any part of this afternoon of prayer with our Holy Father.

I don't know about you, but I have so much enjoyed following along the many events of this papal visit via EWTN, PCN, and satellite radio. And I must say, I have been blown away by the reception and response our Holy Father has gotten from our country. Even at the East Berlin community center gym the other day a non-Catholic could not stop – and I mean not stop – talking to me about Pope Francis and his visit, which people were watching there on TV! It has definitely made me proud to be Catholic, and I hope you're blessed to have similar experiences with your family, co-workers, classmates, and friends too.

One of the things Pope Francis said that caught me off guard was what he said from the balcony of the Capitol after addressing a joint meeting of Congress – the first pope to do so in history. The Holy Father first asked, as he often does, for the people to pray for him. But, then he said, “If there are among you those who do not believe or cannot pray, I ask you please to send good wishes my way.” Now, I have to admit that normally when someone asks for good wishes, it makes my skin crawl, when it’s intended as some sort of quasi-spiritual substitute for prayer. But, that’s not what Pope Francis meant at all by this. Rather, embracing a theology of dialogue, he was seeking to invite everyone to the table in order to interface with the message of the Gospel that he himself, by his office, represents. Actually, in a real way, this gesture reminded me of the scene from our Gospel today where one of the Twelve, John, says to Jesus, “We saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us.” But Jesus replied, “Do not prevent him...For whoever is not against us is for us.” And so – à la Pope Francis – we should not prevent non-believers from engaging in whatever level of solidarity with us as Christians that they can, including “well wishes” – for as long as they are not against us, they are for us.

Another of the areas Pope Francis has been speaking quite a bit about is ecology, which means the relationship between people and the environment. Much of this, actually, flows forth from his most recent encyclical, *Care for our Common Home (Laudato Si)*. I must admit that environmentalism is not at the top of my list of interests. However, when Pope Francis speaks about this topic, he's not merely talking about concern for the environment in and of itself, as is often the focus of the "Green Movement", but rather, what he terms "integral ecology" – meaning, how we treat the environment directly impacts how we live. In particular, when the environment is abused those who are most negatively impacted are the poor, whose access to natural resources is most fragile. And given the global interconnectedness of our world, everything is interrelated – so what impacts some somehow impacts all. Taking this one logical step further, Pope Francis also stated in his encyclical, "How can we genuinely teach the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings [like the environment]...if we fail to protect a human embryo... [therefore,] concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion."

Recently in the news you may have also heard about numerous videos released that have caught Planned Parenthood selling aborted babies and their body parts. This has led to public outrage. And last month on August 22<sup>nd</sup>, literally tens of thousands of people in some 354 cities nationwide protested outside Planned Parenthood centers for this reason. Perhaps you also felt angry about this when you heard it too – I know I did. But, what can *we* do? Does picketing really make a difference? I guess, we could say the same thing about the environmental movement too: so what if our country does something about it; lots of other countries won't. We can feel defeated even before we start when it comes to such endemic issues.

But, the World Meeting of Families, celebrated this past week, is meant to remind us that as individual families, we are united as one holy family that is the Church. The Church is the Body of Christ, made present in our world today. And it is this same Jesus, whose hands and feet, mind and heart that we are. As Church, our mission is love – love which is willing to go outside of its comfort zone to embrace the truth, to share the truth, and to live the truth. Such a lifestyle truly opens our hearts and allows us to perceive the most important things in life. In particular, it enables us to grow in our sensitivity to the needs of others – including the elderly, the disabled, the very young, and the unborn. May God's blessings be upon all our families and upon our family that is Church. (Cited: Archdiocese of Philadelphia World