

**Operation Enduring Victory**  
**Message 3: Advance!**  
**7/23/2017**



July 1-4, 2017  
**Convocation**  
of Catholic Leaders  
The Joy of the Gospel in America

I usually start off each message with a quote from one of the saints but I saw something on a church marquee this week which I thought you might appreciate: “**When in doubt, faith it!**” As always, it’s so good to be with you. We are in week three of a series where we are learning the art of spiritual warfare in order to live victorious Christian lives. If you miss a message or want to listen again it’s as easy as going to the St. Albert website.

Last week we looked at our ‘fighting stance’ which is ‘standing firm’. We stand firm in our faith when we draw great inner strength from God, follow Jesus’ commands, walk daily as one of his disciples and remain connected to the Church.

This week we take up the topic of going on the offensive or advancing the Kingdom of God which Jesus speaks of in today’s Gospel. Jesus repeatedly said to go and make disciples. That’s why the ‘R’ word or retreat is not part of the Christian’s vocabulary but ‘charge’ sure is and I’m not referring to credit cards! With Christ as our head, the rallying cry heard through the ranks of the Church is onward Christian soldiers! This vast army, today over one billion strong is called to move forward with great confidence in advancing the Kingdom of God in our own lives as well as in the lives of others.

So how do we advance? What a perfect Segway for sharing with you what took place three weeks ago at the historic *Joy of the Gospel in America Convocation*. Over 3,000 Catholic leaders comprised of cardinals, bishops, priests, women and men religious and mostly laity were in attendance to hear under the leadership and support of the bishops, the joyous vision of Pope Francis for the Church in the United States and then enter dialogue on how to bring this vision to life. Key note speakers included Cardinals Dolan, Wuerl, O’Malley, Tobin and DiNardo, Archbishops Gregory, Lori, and Gomez and Bishop Robert Barron. Seeing the rich diversity and unity of the Catholic Church at so many levels was inspiring. Imagine 150 bishops processing in for Mass or getting on the elevator with the Holy Father’s ambassador to the United States.

Trying to condense this momentous event into a few minutes is a major challenge but I’m going to give it my best because what occurred will guide and set the direction for the Church in the United States for as long as most of us here will live. As a parish, it is vitally essential that we be in alignment with this great vision of the Church.

The best way I know how to summarize this inspiring vision is to share it in progressive form using key phrases that we're repeated over and over. **The first key phrase shared was 'understanding the landscape of Catholic life in the United States today'**. Listen to how the face of the Catholic Church in the United States is changing today. Population shifts have caused the traditionally strong presence of Catholics in the Northeast to move to the South and West. Giving to the poor is at a record high. Of the 75 million Catholics in the United States, 30 million are inactive. There are 30 million Hispanic Catholics, making up 40% of all Catholics in this country. This percentage is higher among teenagers and young adults. For every 1 new Catholic entering the Church six leave. Support for human life at all stages remains strong. Almost 50% of Catholics who are no longer active in the Church leave before reaching the age of 18. Another 30% leave between the ages of 18 and 23. Only 20% leave after the age of 24. The ones that do return at critical junctures like marriage and baptism of children are becoming few and far between.

**The second key phrase of the Church's vision is 'moment of promise'**. The leadership of the Church senses a movement of the Holy Spirit calling the Church to respond **now** to the challenging trends in Catholic life today, affirming what Paul wrote in today's second reading that the Holy Spirit comes to us in our time of assistance. Pope Francis says, "I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization which will become a road map for pointing out new paths for the Church's journey in years to come."

**The third key phrase of the Church's vision is a 'personal and joyful relationship with Jesus'**. I don't know how many times I heard speakers say that having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ **is** critical. Personal doesn't mean private in the sense that we go it alone but that we are integrally connected to the Community of faith which is the Church. The distinguishing mark of this personal relationship is joy. Listen to the words of Pope Francis, "The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all those who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew."

**The fourth key phrase is 'permanent missionary disciples'**. The joy of knowing Jesus and being one of his disciples can't be kept in. It must be shared with others. Pope Francis says that, "in fidelity to the example of the Master, it is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear. The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded."

**The fifth key phrase is ‘going to the peripheries’.** I hope that you’re beginning to see a pattern here. As we assess the reality of our situation in light of our mission to make disciples, as the leadership of the Church responds to the Spirit’s call that now is the moment of promise, as we enter more fully into the joy of our own personal relationship with Christ and realize that we are being called to be Christ’s missionaries in the world, we head out to the peripheries like our homes, workplace or social network in order to team up with Jesus who is already there. On the peripheries, our ministry is one of developing relationships and accompanying others.

**The sixth key phrase in understanding the Church’s vision is ‘bringing people into the life of the Church’.** After a time of accompanying our brothers and sisters who have been away from the Lord’s Table we say, “Come and see what this wonderful community of communities, this family of families, has to offer you. You’re welcomed here.”

**The seventh and last key phrase is “sense of urgency”.** Step up, the Holy Father says! Make haste. Why are you standing here? Go! By now you’re probably wondering what are our next steps at St. Albert the Great. Let me quickly share what I received from the Convocation which could best be described as the benchmarks of a vibrant parish. This is the type of Catholic culture that we want to continue nurturing at St. Albert in order make our beloved parish even greater.

- Joy on the faces of people.
- Unity and communion with each other.
- Great involvement of the laity.
- Agreement and support among the five generations of parishioners we have.
- Same great message but with some new methods that connect with the times we live in.
- A rich diversity of ages and cultures.
- “Strong spiritual leaders who love Jesus, are faithful to the mission of the Church, and can inspire others by being responsive to the vocation, gifts and charisms that have been given them by the Lord.”
- A common mission where the entire parish is on the same page.
- Celebration of the Sacraments a lot.
- In the words of Pope Francis, ‘muddy and bruised’ at times from being out on the peripheries.
- Greater emphasis on self-giving love.
- Excellence by being on our ‘A’ game.
- Mary as our model of faith who is always alive, dynamic and reaching out.

In terms of concrete actions, I am very pleased to announce that on November 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> we will be bringing together 80 of our parish leaders for a leadership summit. During the summit we will look at where we are and where we need to go in light of the direction the Church is taking. The summit will be facilitated by nationally known Catholic speaker Mark Mogilka and out of that summit will come a strategic plan to direct our parish for the next several years.

I would like to leave you with two thoughts for reflection:

1. Today's message hashtag is #advance. What a wonderful time it is to be a Catholic in the United States! You've in the right place at the right time. This is the moment that many have longed for. We must not let it go to waste.
2. Pray for our November 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> **Leadership Summit** in order that we as a parish will align ourselves more fully with the greater vision of the Church!

**God bless all of you!**