

World Youth Day Homily
American Pilgrim Gathering
Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Saturday, July 30, 2016

My sisters and brothers in the Lord, if you or I had the privilege to meet her personally in a crowd and not know who she was, chances are she would have made little impression. At first glance she seemed as ordinary as they come. She was short in stature, with no great physical beauty, not necessarily well spoken, no large circle of friends, no great amount of money and no social connections. Chances are we would have passed her by. Yet, as it is always true in life, first glances are always deceiving. For the woman of whom I am referring was anything but ordinary. She was extraordinary. She was remarkable. She was great.

Each day she would rise early in the morning deep in prayer and make it her business to go out and walk into the shadows of the city that she had adopted as her own and reach out to those that the rest of society had cast aside. She literally walked the streets and the gutters, attending to those who were sick and those who were left simply to die. She tended them, cared for them, fed them, brought them to a bed and a home where they could have dignity in the dying moments of their life.

If that were not extraordinary enough, this woman, who is now called the mother of all India, often would go out to beg for food not for herself but for the orphans entrusted to her care. There is a famous story of Blessed Theresa of Calcutta when one day she walked into a baker's shop and she asked for bread for the orphans. The baker, after giving her a huge smile, turned, looked her straight in the face and spit in her face. Now my friends I am not sure what you would have said at that moment. Being born and raised in Brooklyn, I will not tell you what I would have said at that moment. But I will tell you what she said. With eyes of love, with a heart of mercy, with no anger or vengeance, as she removed the spittle from her face, she said to the baker, "Sir, thank you for the gift that you have given me, now what about the bread for the orphans?"

Remarkable, extraordinary! So I ask you, what allowed Theresa of Calcutta to live such an extraordinary life? We can ask that question of many others. What allowed a priest in the silence of a concentration camp cell to make an extraordinary choice to exchange his life for a stranger? What allowed a man in many ways as ordinary as you and me, after nearly being killed because of his faith and his leadership as our Vicar of Christ, what allowed that man in the quiet of a prison cell, face-to-face, with a heart full of mercy, to forgive his assassin? What allows ordinary people to do such extraordinary things? What allows them to live an extraordinary life of mercy, charity, love and peace?

This is the question that has brought us here to Krakow. It is the question that has brought us here to this extraordinary pilgrimage of mercy. Yet the question is not phrased correctly. For it is not "what" allowed them but "who" allowed them and that "who" is none other than Jesus, our Master and Lord, in the power of His Holy Spirit. Christ was alive in their minds, hearts and spirits and took ordinariness and made it great. And that is why you and I are here my friends, for you like

me, ordinary in so many ways we were called here to be empowered to become great in Jesus Christ.

It has already begun in you. As we heard in the Book of Revelation, God marked you and me on the day of our baptism with His grace. Within us dwells the power of Christ in His Holy Spirit and all the good that you and I have been able to do in life was done because Christ is alive in you and me through the power of His grace. For those who have been confirmed, the seven fold gifts of Christ's life have been poured upon us so that He will make what is ordinary, extraordinary, and allow us to become His image in the world. We are already on our pilgrimage and now He is asking us to take the next step, to open ourselves to what He can do in you and me. Christ wants us to live our destiny as the children of God and His brothers and sisters.

Now you may be saying: Bishop, all of this sounds great, wonderful and fantastic. But tell me, how do I do this? How do I do this?

If you want to live an extraordinary life in Christ, allow the Holy Spirit to transform your eyes so you can begin to see what the world is blind to. We must begin to see our sisters and brothers in need not as problems to be solved but as sisters and brothers to be loved. We must stand in solidarity with them in the hour of their suffering. Pray with me that we will become blind to the things that the world sees as important- money, power, privilege and the differences between us as if those differences are anything other than our strength to grow together in Christ.

Pray with me that the Spirit will transform your ears and mine so we will begin to hear the cries of the poor that the world is deaf to. The Spirit will transform your hands and mine, so that we will use them to build up the Body of Christ and to go where no one else dares to go and to reach out and touch those who are in need with love.

My friends, as you continue to walk this pilgrimage, ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen and transform your feet and mine, because mercy is not an excuse for anyone to do whatever he or she wishes to do. We are to stand firm in the truth of our Catholic faith and to help people to understand in love the great and noble destiny that is theirs in Jesus Christ. We must ask them, as we ask ourselves, on our knees, for the forgiveness of our Merciful Lord.

My friends, it can happen. It will happen, one day at a time, one act at a time, if we allow the Spirit to lead us on the pilgrimage of life.

Therefore you may be saying, Bishop Frank, so what you are really saying is that you think that I can be like Mother Theresa. You actually think that I can be like St. Maximilian Kolbe? You actually believe that I can be like St. John Paul II? Well, my friends, allow me to answer my own question with three words: Yes I Do! Yes, we all do and you do as well because on our own we can do nothing. With the Holy Spirit alive in you and me, we can become the extraordinary missionaries of mercy that is our call in Christ- one day at a time.

My friends do not be afraid to be great. Do not be afraid to live an extraordinary life in Christ. Do not be afraid to do what everyone else will never dare to do because Christ will transform you and

make you what Mother Theresa is, what Maximilian Kolbe is, what John Paul II is and what you and I will one day become. For Christ is calling us to become saints.

On the fourth of September, the Christian world will gather at Saint Peter Basilica with Francis, our Holy Father and they will declare that simple, ordinary, at first glance unremarkable woman, and call her what she is truly is, a saint of Jesus Christ. My prayer for you and me is that some day the same thing will be said of us.

Are you ready? Are you ready my friends to continue this pilgrimage? Are you ready to accept this calling to become a saint, to become remarkable in Christ, one day at a time. Are you ready?

So my friends, if you are ready, let us pause to receive the body, blood, soul and divinity of the only Savior that the world will ever know, let us rest, let us walk to the Camp, let us walk back home and let us walk together to everlasting life.

May Jesus Christ be praised, now and forever, Amen.