

Thank you. I bring greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and also greetings from the people of the Diocese of Guatemala. It's a joy and honor to share this morning with you, and also being grateful for the hospitality that the diocese of San Diego, through your bishop, Bishop Susan Snook has offered me and others that have come to share with you in the celebration of the Good News Festival. I hope that many of you, not all of you, had the opportunity to share in the beautiful evening yesterday of music, prayer and certainly great preaching by our presiding Bishop Michael Curry. I hope that the sense of the Good News and the festival is not just about a day in the sense of what happens in our lives and the sense of our relationship with God and with one another, but it's about our sense of being in general, especially during this advent season.

It's opportunity for us to celebrate, to honor and to live into those good news that had been shared with us throughout the years. The opportunity to know that the love of God is with us, in us and we are the presence of God in many different ways, hoping that this reflection is going to give us the opportunity to immerse ourselves into what it means to live those good news. Now that I got clear about this phone that is here, I just want to know if there is a designated caller if I go over 30 minutes, because that's what Mark says, that after 30 minutes the phone will go off. I wanted to know if there's a designated caller.

When we think about the message of Jesus in the gospels, and the way that he lived his life, and the way that he proclaimed that love of God, we come to realize that one of the constants of Jesus' message and the way of his life was about reaching out to those that were living hardships or difficulties or were being pushed away by society in general. Many of us here in this place definitely can relate to that reality, not necessarily if we are in dire needs or extreme situations, but nonetheless in the need of being embraced by the love of God. Otherwise, I don't think we'd be here, but we are here because we want, we need, we're looking for that love of God. The hardships of life are challenges that we all face, and I was saying earlier this morning about that in Guatemala, we know a little bit about that, the aspects of the challenges of economics, the weather.

I was just sharing a little bit before we came in about the little bit of rain you have, because I can tell you in Guatemala this last winter was really bad. Even the storms that didn't hit us as hard as it had hit Nicaragua or Honduras, with Julia and the other storms that, or hurricanes that hit those part of the country, just the rain itself without the wind, for us in Guatemala were devastating in some aspects or some areas of Guatemala.

Our diocesan camp got flooded three times in the months of October and November, and in one of the occasions the water did come into our buildings, because it had been raining quite a bit before the storms came so the ground was already saturated.

So, hardships in many ways are experienced in our context, and Guatemala is not unique, but unfortunately because of all the other things that are going on end up being expanded in a much greater way. So, when we hear about the good news, it is difficult to understand what the good news in the midst of the challenges that are faced. But for us, the people of God, the people that have faith and hope that the presence of God into our lives is definitely good news, we try to grasp onto that in the best way we can, because again, there is enough to go round that can put us down or to make it hard to understand that sense of the presence of God in a positive way.

So, today, one of the things that we hear in the gospel is about John the Baptist that was sent before Jesus to open the way for Jesus' news and life to be understood by others in a way to know that he was the Messiah, but John himself, being in jail and not sure how this was going to play out, sent some of his messengers to find out. In that way, for many of us in this time, especially in Advent, it is a good question, not necessarily out of doubt, but the aspect of confirmation that we all need to know that what we are doing and the way that we are living, it is centered into that presence of God through Jesus Christ in our lives, that we want to know is Jesus the real thing?

One of the ways that in the gospel in this morning, we hear the response of Jesus is, "Go tell John, go tell him. But at the same time, go tell others. Go tell them what you are seeing, and what you hear." The blind received their sight, the lame walked, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear and the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. In many ways, those things we can say, "Okay, let's see if in our times we can see some people that cannot walk, stand up again. Those that cannot see are seeing again." Let's figure it out if that's going on or not to know that the presence of God is still relevant and real in our times.

Maybe we don't get to see that in the way that is described literally, but we can see it in the way that the reality of life in our times gets to be lived. There are many of us that have sight but cannot see. There are many of us that have good legs but are not moving. There are some of us that cannot hear or live the good news because of whatever challenges we're facing. So, it's in times like this that we need to be reassured that truly it is Jesus that brings the good news. One of the ways that I was struck

yesterday, and for some of you that were there would remember the words of our presiding bishop, taking them from John 1:4. What he says, "beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God."

That was one of the lines that presiding bishop used to remind us that it is when we understand love in the sense of not just this, oh, good feeling about knowing or being with somebody else, but the true love of God that is about overcoming whatever obstacle it is in our lives because we know that there is something better and more powerful than us, that we know that God is with us. That, as also Bishop Susan kept reminding us last night, that is good news. Today we are here, because we are looking, seeking, trying to understand the good news, and I hope that the reflections of one another in regards to how we become the good news becomes real for us. We were just having a class this morning about vocations, and one of the things that Father Mark mentioned in there is about the joy that comes understanding what our vocation is, and that is good news.

We need to be reminded by ourselves and by the community that we are engaged with here at St. James, which by the way is the same name of our cathedral, so we share something in common. We're not "by-the-Sea" by way, but we are St. James, nonetheless. We need to be reminded of what it means to be part of a community that encourage one another in that love of God, because we know God. I was impressed. [holding up the Sunday bulletin] I was very impressed, to be honest with you, and believe you, I'm not going to go the 30 minutes by reading all the announcements, okay? Because it could take me 20 minutes.

I mean, it's quite a few pages, and the reason I highlight that is because that's one of the ways that we can affirm one another, that Christ is the one because of the things that we do, the way that we live, and the things that are part of this community that make sure that our people that cannot seek and see the presence of God, that the people that are not willing, able or are afraid of moving, can move, because of what we do as the people of God here at St. James. That there is new life, that there is something great for us to proclaim, that we call the good news of Christ, because Christ is with us. Emmanuel, we say, Christ, God with us. God is with us, and we are in God because we love. Love is in us.

My hope, my prayer is that we continue. When someone asks about Jesus, we not only go and say, "Go and tell them," But we will be the witnesses that say, "Let me

show you. Because some time ago I couldn't see. I couldn't see beyond what was before me, but now that I have Christ with me, I can see much better." When people ask, "Is it Jesus," and you can say, "Yes. I was afraid of moving. I was afraid of doing things, but now that God is with me, with that love that God is in me, and I'm in him, I can move, I can do." We are the signs that Christ is the real thing. We are the ones that are not to say "just look at somebody else. Look at what God is doing with me." Let us all commit ourselves to walk in that love because we are of God. God has created us with that sense of wholeness and holiness to be God's presence in this world.

I so much look forward for opportunities and ways that we can share with one another, because one of the things that I really wanted to say, and I've been saying it in this morning's sermon, is to say that I want to go back to Guatemala and say, "We're not alone, because we have brothers and sisters that also are witnessing what it means to have God's love in us." I could say it again. It is not easy, because of all the challenges that we face, but our faith and our commitment to one another are going to assure us that God is real, because we are real in that relationship with God.

May God give us the strength, the wisdom to move forward, not to be afraid, for us to know that the challenges of life will continue. There is nothing that says that those are going to stop. At the contrary, it says you're going to face hardship, but not forget that "I'm with you till the end of the ages". May that be an affirmation, especially during this Advent season when we have experienced, and I was mentioning, and I don't know, maybe for some of you, maybe even sooner than that, that since Halloween seems like Christmas was here, all the decorations and all the businesses already putting up things that are reminding us that Christmas is coming. But the question is, is our heart and our mind ready for that?

Just as we have done decorations our home, may God give us again all that is needed, so we can receive Christ into our hearts. May this experience that we will have with the children today remind us about that love of God that comes out of the eyes and the behavior and the expression of children in our midst, because that's how we also have grown to know the love of God, as a child with innocence, with open hearts. When we continue to walk with one another as the people of God here in this place and beyond, may we be faithful, knowing that we are the signs of Christ in our world. Amen.