

MASS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
THE CENTER FOR PASTORAL LEADERSHIP
AUGUST 24, 2024

READINGS:
Ezekiel 36:24-28 [#764-4]
Psalm
1 Corinthians 12:4-13 [#765-9]
John 14:15-17 [#768-9]

Welcome home!

Welcome home to this newly consecrated chapel dedicated to Mary, the Mother of the Good Shepherd, the crown jewel of the CPL renovation project!

Welcome home to this new year of formation! Welcome home to this holy time, place, and process where priestly, diaconal, lay ecclesial, and ongoing formation intersect and interact under the guidance of the Holy Spirit!

Welcome home to those of you who are returning for another year of formation. Welcome home to what has already become familiar to you: community gatherings, liturgical prayer, academic classes, parish and apostolic assignments – the recognizable foundations for our spiritual, human, intellectual, and pastoral formation.

Welcome home especially to those of you who are new to our formation programs: first year seminarians, aspirants to the diaconate, and candidates for lay ecclesial ministry. Yes, welcome home to all that is unfamiliar, overwhelming, confusing, and challenging. Trust me, we've all been where you are today!

Welcome home members of the Doctor of Ministry cohort, MA and continuing education students, and all our senior scholars!

Welcome home Bishop Malesic! Michelle Nowak, Brother Mick, Deacon George, Fr. Dragga, Fr. Turner, and Fr. Mamich, welcome home! Welcome home faculty and formators! Welcome home spiritual directors, field ed supervisors, and mentors! Welcome home CPL staff members and those who gracefully guide our daily operations!

Welcome home!

Right about now you are probably asking yourselves: Where the heck is he going with this?

In today's first reading from the book of the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord God proclaims a divine promise – the promise of a homecoming.

Be warned! Listen carefully! This isn't just about ancient Israel. It's about us!

The promise of a homecoming! The promise of a future “welcome home!” And remember, the Spirit of God always fulfills and makes God's promises happen:

“Thus says the Lord God: I will take you away from among the nations, gather you from all the foreign lands, and bring you back to your own land.”

First proclaimed amidst the crisis of 587 B.C., this divine promise, this prophetic oracle, mediated through the ministry of Ezekiel, announced God's plan to bring the Israelite community home – to bring them home. Having lost the Promised Land, the holy city of Jerusalem, and the Temple due to their infidelities and unwillingness to trust in God's sovereignty, the Israelites were living in exile in Babylon. They were living in a land that was not their home, living in a foreign home yet really living homeless.

What's scary is that many of the Israelites had become comfortable with their life in exile – accepting their situation as normal and accommodating themselves to their surroundings. They embraced their new home – their Babylonian social status, culture, and lifestyle – and forgot that they were homeless.

Listen! I warned you. Is not this story a part of our own? Immersed in their present culture – their new normal – they relinquished their real home.

Until ... until God breaks in to shake things up! Through Ezekiel's ministry, the divine promise is clearly designed to shake the homeless Israelites out of their lethargy, despair, and excessive accommodation to the culture around them. The divine promise forcefully intends to awaken in them the desire to imagine, to hope for, and to seek their real home.

Listen! Be warned! Are we not here because God has shaken things up in our lives? Called us out of what our culture would consider normal to journey on a different path? Hasn't the Spirit of God awakened in us a desire, an imagination, a hope, and a search for something more?

What's amazing is that God doesn't act on the Israelites' behalf because they have earned or deserve it. God doesn't even act on their behalf solely out of love for them, even though God does passionately love this forgetful people. No, God acts out of self-interest. God intends for this people to be a witness to the nations. God will act powerfully to bring this people home so that their lives will be a visible sign – a sacrament – of God's sovereign and gracious power to transform, to change people's lives. Israel's homecoming will be an invitation to other nations and peoples to seek and know the God who saves and gives life. "To each individual," St. Paul writes, "the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit" – not just to benefit me, but for the benefit of the Church and beyond.

Listen! Heed the warning! When God calls, when God acts, we should expect to be changed, to be transformed, to be challenged and stretched. Divine presence, promise, and grace acting through the formation process will do that to you. What God does is not done solely for our benefit, but so that we can be witnesses, visible signs, sacraments, ministers, and servants of God's saving presence in the world.

"I will give you a new heart and place a new Spirit within you," says the Lord God, "taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my Spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees."

I will give you a new heart and place a new Spirit within you – and therein lies our home. Welcome home! Not just to a place, but to a process, a relationship – a way of living, of serving, of ministering, and of being.

Listen! Be warned. To find a home in the heart of God, to live with our hearts transformed requires:

Trust – not just in God, but in those whom God brings into our lives to guide, challenge, configure, and love us.

Surrender – not just to God, but to our formators and the ministerial formation process given to us by Christ's Church.

Conversion – not just to God from our sins and weaknesses, but often from our personal idols, our own ways of thinking, desiring, and acting.

Love – not just of God, but also of neighbor, especially the neighbor we find most difficult to love, in whom Jesus is most distressingly disguised.

“I will cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you,” says the Lord. But probably not without us squirming, kicking against the goad, resisting grace, and even sometimes running away.

Let’s face it, formation is a blessing ... and a curse, a crown and a cross. It’s not easy. It’s challenging and demanding. The Lord isn’t asking a little of us. The Lord is asking everything from us. Yet, with all the challenges and demands that formation brings, in the depths of our hearts, the Spirit of God quietly whispers: “This is where you need to be. Welcome home!”

And when we listen, when we heed the Spirit’s voice, when we trust formation’s graced process of growth and transformation, we may well be surprised by what God can do through, with, and in us. God’s promises will be fulfilled with the Spirit’s manifestation of spiritual gifts, forms of service, and different workings discovered in our pastoral, intellectual, human, and spiritual formation. By God’s grace, we will recognize – and hopefully, the Church will affirm – in ourselves and one another wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, mighty deeds, prophecy, discernment of spirits, varieties of tongues and their interpretation, and many other skills all placed at the service of the one Body through the one Spirit.

Today, we begin this new year of formation together – four programs – priestly, diaconal, lay ecclesial, and ongoing formation – guided by the one Spirit for the sake of serving the one Body of Christ. Here and now, we give thanks and praise to God for one another, for this place of formation, and for the Lord’s invitation to discern and embrace the call to ministerial service. Most of all, today we thank God that the divine promises are still being proclaimed and fulfilled in Christ Jesus:

“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth... ..you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you.”

We do not make this formation journey alone or on our own. We have one another and the Spirit of God as companions. Listen then! Heed the Spirit’s voice at this time, in this place, with this community, for this process: “This is where you belong. Welcome home!”