

THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES
Sermon for the
Twenty-sixth Annual Meeting –Session 2
Diocesan Convention

Welcome to the Twenty-sixth Annual Meeting, Part two of the Episcopal Diocese of El Camino Real. On behalf of the Diocese, I want to express my thanks to the organizers of this Convention and to the hosts. We do have a tight schedule, but amidst that we want to take time to praise God and to give Him thanks as well as to ask His presence with us as we gather to make some serious decisions so that we can be more effective as servants of the Lord. We have been experiencing team ministry among ourselves and I do believe that it has been effective. The success is due not only of working together, but due to respecting our partner, Jesus Christ.

As a diocese we have experienced what Paul is saying in his second letter to the Corinthians about not losing heart in the great task that has been given to him. A person who is conscious of his task and include Jesus Christ as a partner can do amazing things and I have seen lay and clergy at work, conscious of their task, not for their honor and glory, but for God, and they have done amazing things.

Too many people are greedy for power, but the real characteristic of a person is not his power but his weakness and anyone who is part of a team is conscious of this. Team players depend on each other as well as on the real source of strength and wisdom which is from Jesus himself. Paul describes the Christian life in which our infirmity is intermingled with God's glory.

There are all kinds of pressure on us, especially today where we have so much to do but so little time, yet we are never in so tight a corner that there is no way out. Because we trust our partnership with Jesus, there is always an escape route for our spirit to the

spaciousness of God.

We can certainly relate to the martyrs. One of the most notable things about them is that it was amidst their sorest times that they had their sweetest times with Christ. We can also relate to Christians who do not know what is to be done, but even then they never doubt that something can be done. I know that there are times when I could not well see where life is going, but because of my team support and trust in the true vine that I never doubt that it is going somewhere. There are times when we need to learn the hardest lesson of all, the very lesson which Jesus himself had to learn in Gethsemane, how to accept what he cannot understand and still say, "God, you are love; I build my faith on that."

A good lesson that we have learned is not that we did not fall, but that every time we fell we were able to rise again. It is not that we were never been beaten, but that we were never ultimately defeated. We may have lost a battle, but we knew that in the end we never did lose the campaign.

To share the life of Christ is to share the risks involve. If a man wishes to share the life of Christ he must be ready to die with him. I have witnessed that risk taken by many that has walked the extra mile to serve the Lord. Like Paul, they knew and accepted the law of Christian life: "no Cross, no crown." Paul could go through what he did because he knew that it was not for nothing; he knew that it was to bring others to Christ. When a person has the conviction that what is happening to him is happening literally for Christ's sake he can face anything.

I am proud to be a member of this diocese, not because it is a perfect diocese but it is because it is alive and well. It does not mean that we are 100% healthy, but we are alive and well enough to have the strength to serve the Lord as we are and to know that our health comes from the true vine, Jesus Christ himself who gives it to us.

While I am proud to be a part of this Diocese, I am aware that our journey of effective ministry is still challenging and has room for improvement, yet we must not lose pace or fall into the trap of letting go of the source of life.

No job is impossible when we place it in God's hands. I have witnessed His hands at work during these past twenty-two months. I was able to see His hands when we sat around a table to talk and find solutions to the most difficult situations and we were all honest in saying at times 'we don't know what to do in this case, but let us sit and talk about it.'

Yes God's hands were at work when we sat to talk with love, when we sat and listened to each other, when we were able to say what we had to say with love, not with hate, not to intentionally hurt anyone, but to say what we needed to say. His hands were present when persons were willing to make the sacrifices to abandon family and other responsibilities to come together in meetings in the name of Jesus Christ.

Of course there are still unsolved problems within our diocese. There are parishes and persons still hurting, some are still afraid to open their doors to ethnic ministries, to reach out to the poor, etc. and we need to continue to trust in Him and work with Him and for Him. We are not a diocese that will allow problems to stop us from doing ministry because it is in doing ministry that we really learn that our ministry is God's ministry. We are aware that we are alive and well because of the source of our life which comes from the true vine.

No congregation that is part of the true vine will work only for itself and by itself. If it is connected to God, then it is connected with the other congregations and the world-wide Church. Our wine may be bitter, but it is our wine. So let us drink it together as a gift

from Jesus. We now raise our hands and say SALUD! And in thanksgiving for what He has given us let us sing the Doxology.