



The Episcopal Diocese of New York

Transcription of The Homily of The Rt. Rev. Matthew F. Heyd At the 247th Convention of the Diocese of New York Saturday, November 11, 2023

Rt. Rev. Matthew: Good morning, church. Every single day, there on Huguenot Avenue, in the parish house, in a vestibule right off the parish hall, every single day, Deacon Hyacinth Lee and a team of volunteers serve brown bag lunches to everyone who comes. Every single day through the pandemic, every single day, summer, winter, across four seasons, they are there offering not only a lunch, but a word, a connection, to know the names and the stories of those who come. In that, they become new community together every single day.

This story is spectacular, but it's not unique. Across the congregations, and schools, and chaplaincies of the Diocese of New York, across 10 counties and 3 regions, these connections, these stories happen all the time. From Wednesday night Centering Prayer in Walden, to Monday night EFM in Pleasant Valley. Feeding programs from Rosebank to Amenia. Transcendent music from St. Thomas Fifth Avenue and from churches across our diocese. Sunday mornings, we gather together across 14 languages and very different communities. Most importantly of all, beside hospital bedsides, for people coming home from prison, for the people whom we miss and love, the conversations, the phone calls, the emails, all the connections that seek God in each other.

Where do we see you, Jesus? Where did we see you when you were hungry, when you were thirsty, when you were in prison, when you needed to be seen, and heard, and known, and loved?

This gospel comes from the very last sermon from the Gospel of Matthew, and it's about the end times, but this gospel, this call is about all times. This gospel is about us, and how God made us, where God resides in our life, where Jesus is in our lives, in our communities, who we are as people of faith, and who we're called to be as church.

It's an affirmation of the hard work of our communities, big and small, in our towns and cities and places off the main road that no one else sees, but we do. Where do we see you, Jesus? In all those places. To see each other, the spirit of God that abides in us and that lives in our communities. An affirmation of the ministries every single day across every part of the Diocese of York. It's an affirmation of where God lives, but a challenge as to who we're called to be.

The passage of the sermon that Deacon Pedro and Deacon Pam read stops midway. You all know that, right? [laughs] It stops with a happy part, but there's more. When do we not see you? This call to see each other, Jesus says, isn't

optional because it abides in us. We're called to see it in each other. Say it with me. When do we see you, Jesus?

Congregation: When do we see you, Jesus?

Rt. Rev. Matthew: No, we're here together. When do we see you, Jesus?

Congregation: When do we see you, Jesus?

Rt. Rev. Matthew: It has been joy for me in these first months to be out with you every week and see how you help us see Jesus across every one of our communities. How you help proclaim a gospel to the world needs to hear this message too. When do we see you, Jesus?

Congregation: When do we see you, Jesus?

Rt. Rev. Matthew: We know what Jesus says is, Jesus sees us most fully, and we're called to see each other when we're most vulnerable, when we're most at the edge. That's the center of this gospel. That's the center of this call. We know from all of our communities that time is now. This is a vulnerable time for every one of our churches. This has been, for us, a season of struggle, a season of struggle for all of us, a financial struggle, trying to figure out stewardship in a time when stewardship's changing, mission struggle at a time when our neighborhoods are changing from what we'd known before, trying to find new clergy, trying to take care of our buildings. All of that feels harder than it's ever felt before.

Almost all of our communities are struggling in some way. We are in a season of struggle. We've taken this struggle and been told it's a story of decline. We see the charts. We see the graphs. We can feel it in our communities. It's just different than it was even 5 or 10 years ago. It's harder than it was 5 or 10 years ago. It is indeed a season of struggle. The story of our struggles is not the story of decline, but rather the story of change with courage.

Every time I'm out with you, I see that, and what you're doing, and what you're taking on. Big places and small places taking courageous decisions to let things go that have meant something to us for generations. New collaborations that we didn't think were possible even a couple years ago.

New possibilities for ministry in seeing each other is a season of struggle and our story, it's about change with courage to be able to follow the spirit in new ways in each of our neighborhoods. Frankly, we know that the good old days, well, the good old days weren't that good for so many of our people. We are just now celebrating the 50th anniversary of women's ordination, [applause] about 2,000 years late. There are more people celebrating at our altars than there were 50 years ago, a more diverse group of our clergy than we had 50 years ago, more diverse people coming to our communities than 50 years ago, and that we are a church over 7 days, and so many of our places is new for us in this last generation.

There are so many ways in which we are stronger now because we are more diverse and we are more broad, and those very first steps to recognize where we see Jesus

in more diverse leadership, in different languages, and more voices, those very first steps call us to do more.

Our story in this season is a story of renewal of our church, to follow the spirit where it leads us in our neighborhoods, to know there is no checklist to be church. No should do, but rather the charisms of our people and the neighborhoods where we serve.

I begin my ministry with you in humility, knowing that the story of renewal has been lifted up in this place and by our predecessors for generations. Like Bishop Dietsche, I'm surprised to be your bishop, but you were such a blessing, and your courage, such an inspiration that we can find renewal by listening to each other's stories.

Say it with me.

[laughter]

Usually, I'm inspired. Where did we see you, Jesus?

Congregation: Where did we see you, Jesus?

Rt. Rev. Matthew: In each other.

Congregation: In each other.

Rt. Rev. Matthew: In our ministries big and small.

Congregation: In our ministries big and small.

Rt. Rev. Matthew: In every part of our diocese.

Congregation: In every part of our diocese.

Rt. Rev. Matthew: Because if there ever was a checklist, there not isn't anymore. It's the charisms, the voices, the people of our communities that guide us forward in where we go and in what we let go.

One of the things we have to let go of, if this will be a season of renewal for us, we have to let go of our shame. The shame that somehow we should be different. That we should be what we were 20, or 30, or 5, or 50 years ago. That the pictures on the wall from long ago should be the pictures of the church in the future. We are not what we were. We are still called. We're still invited, and God is with us in this age. Where did we see you, Jesus? In this moment of struggle, in this moment of renewal, this time of possibility.

We do this, all of this, not for ourselves, but for the healing of the world which God has called us to join. Which we do is so many did last week in baptizing children and adults who come to our parishes. We do when we welcome new people to the lines in our food pantries, in our soup kitchens, to the lunches after church, when we see people the way they're not seen in other parts of our world. This is a season of

renewal not for us because the world needs healing now. We can feel it. We can experience it. Can we respond to it? Where do we see you, Jesus?

Congregation: Where do we see you, Jesus?

Rt. Rev. Matthew: In the healing of the world.

Congregation: In the healing of the world.

Rt. Rev. Matthew: Today, we launched the mission review of our diocese to listen to each other's stories, to see Jesus in each other, each other's struggles, each other's opportunities, to be with each other in the hard choices we make and the spirit we follow. To make sure as we listen to the stories together, that the pastoral fabric of our whole diocese is with you. That we focus locally because the Holy Spirit moves at ground level. Each of our communities can focus outward and see Jesus in their neighborhoods. We ground this, all of this in prayer.

Reconcile and renew us, Lord. Awaken our courage to follow your spirit. Open our hearts to share your love. Grant us grace to serve your church in this time of change, because blessed are we who get to join in God's healing of the world. Our story, you and I, the story of our diocese, the story of our congregations and chaplaincies in schools, our story is change through courage. Our story is the renewal of the church for the healing of the world every single day. In Christ's name.

Congregation: Amen.

Rt. Rev. Matthew: Amen.

[applause]

[00:17:26] [END OF AUDIO]