



Archdiocese of San Antonio
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Homily – 50th Anniversary
Holy Family Church (New Braunfels)
September 13, 2014

What does any of you remember about the year 1964, fifty years ago? Let's see. Lyndon Johnson was the President, and Nikita Khrushchev was the leader of the Soviet Union. President Johnson declared the "War on Poverty," began the "Great Society" program, and signed the Voter Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act that year. The Vietnam war was going on, and the U.S. and the Soviets were testing nuclear bombs and competing in launching spacecraft.

The Beatles arrived on these shores, and the Rolling Stones came to San Antonio for the Texas Teen Fair on their first U.S. tour. Mission Stadium closed, plans were progressing for HemisFair 1968, and Joe Morgan was named Texas League Player of the Year.

The Second Vatican Council was in session, and Pope Paul VI visited the Holy Land and met with the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras. Closer to home, Archbishop Lucey established St. Jude Church, Holy Spirit Parish, St. Thomas More, and St. Martin de Porres in San Antonio. He also dedicated this Holy Family Church, which is so close to the hearts of all here present. Those were busy, hectic, exciting times – consisting of both good news and bad news, victories and disappointments, God's blessings and the works of the forces of evil -- very much like today, although much has changed.

What remains everlasting is the word of God. Today's readings help shape our celebration of your golden anniversary today.

King Solomon built the first temple in Jerusalem, and at the dedication the glory of the LORD descended upon it. In the first reading King Solomon asks: "Can it be that God dwells among men on earth? If the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain you, how much less this temple?" My dear sisters and brothers, we believe firmly that God is in our midst today – in the Eucharist, in the Word of God that is proclaimed, in the priests who concelebrate with me, and in this entire assembly. So, let us **give thanks to the Lord!**

The second reading reminds us that **we are the Church!** Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus himself as the capstone or cornerstone, we are "being built into a fitting dwelling place for God in the Spirit." So, we are not only celebrating this physical building, this house of God, but also this entire community of faith. We are "no longer strangers and sojourners" – whether you have been a member of this parish for fifty years or just came last week – we are all "fellow citizens and members of the household of God." We are all disciples of the risen Lord, sharing in the Church's mission to proclaim the gospel and to serve others.

This leads us to the gospel, which, although familiar to us, is quite striking. Tax collectors in Palestine in Jesus' day worked for the hated Roman occupation army. There were no laws to regulate the collection of taxes. Collectors bid on the job, and the highest bidder got it. There was no salary involved, but, if the tax collector could collect more than he had bid, he could become quite wealthy, as most of them did. Moreover, their primary victims were the vulnerable poor. They often took what little the poor had on which to survive. Frankly, the tax collectors were greedy extortionists, great sinners, and traitors to their own people.

Knowing that Jesus proclaims justice for all and God's compassionate love for all, especially the poor, we might expect that he would call down lightning from heaven

to strike Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, when he encounters him. Instead, Jesus invites himself to stay at Zacchaeus's home where the tax collector celebrates with a banquet. Who will attend such an event? Only public sinners and other tax collectors. This is a scandal! When the crowd sees this, they grumble at his decision. But Zacchaeus' life is totally changed by this encounter with Jesus. He promises to repay what he has extorted – four times as much in fact – and to give half of his possessions to the poor.

This is a powerful reminder to all of us that we need to make room at the Lord's table for everyone. We are not to limit our service or our compassionate love to our family and friends. We are to be inclusive. We are not to write off sinners or people who are considered different from ourselves. We are to put on Christ every day and enable everyone we encounter to have a taste of God's love and compassion. We are sent to proclaim the gospel of love – by our deeds, using words when necessary.

May Our Lady of Guadalupe teach us gratitude for God's blessings, realization that we are brought together by the Holy Spirit to be a community of faith, that our Christian embrace is to be as wide as Jesus' embrace on the Cross – excluding no one.