



Homily given by
His Eminence
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PILGRIMAGE OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND

Cathedral Basilica Notre-Dame de Québec, Québec, June 16, 2014

(1 K 21: 1-16; Ps 5; Mt 5: 38-42)

« *But I say to you...* »

Dear brothers and sisters,

What are we to make of today's readings ? What do they say to us as we experience this pilgrimage on this beautiful June day ? Ultimately, the Lord is inviting us to see things differently, in a new way. Jesus invites us to enter into the spirit of the New Testament, of a new Covenant. "*You have heard that it was said... but I say to you...*" And that is a passage we are all called to do.

The Holy Door you went through this morning that portrays Jesus with open arms inviting you in, is a good visual aid that reveals us much more. In fact, during all of our life, we go through passages, stages, steps. Our God is always there, present with open arms to invite us to make steps in the right direction, to where life is abundant, to happiness, truth and love, to holiness.

Our human nature and the many solicitations attempt to distract us from the good path and challenge our faith and the choices we make every day of our lives. The world wants to pull us in one direction and God is calling us to choose life ! That is what life is all about, a long battle. But the Good News for us followers of Jesus Christ, for us his disciples who trust in His Word, we know that God leads us always to life and abundant life. Today's biblical readings illustrate this very well.

In the first reading, Ahab and Jezebel use greed, conspiracy and ultimately murder to successfully gain a highly sought after vineyard. In the Gospel, Jesus invokes the Old Testament commandment meant to moderate vengeance : *“An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”* This indicates that the punishment should not exceed the crime / the injury done. Jesus forbids even this proportionate retaliation, suggesting we respond to our better instincts. Even the response to the Psalm gives one pause : *“Lord, listen to my groaning.”*

These readings speak of many things, one being human nature and how we respond to the challenges and opportunities of life. How we respond to each other. On any given day we are confronted with choices. The choices we make shape the life we lead and the relationships we experience.

We all know there are shadows in all of our gardens. We know from experience that we have the capacity to be children of the light and respond in word and deed to the ways of God in whose image we are made. We also know we have the capacity to deviate from that path and do the opposite. I don't know about you, but I find myself often repeating these words of Saint Paul: *“For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing”* (Rom 7:19). In today's Psalm, David expresses that divided heart as he prays for the security and protection of the temple from evildoers.

We humbly recognize this constant struggle in our lives. That is why we need to continue to be nourished by prayer, by the Word of God, by the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. That is why we gather as faith communities, to help each other choose life and grow in holiness. That is why we come on pilgrimages, to ask the Lord for his strength and his light.

Pope Francis, in his recent Apostolic Exhortation, invites us to take an important step towards a true personal conversion. These words appear to me as very appropriate for you who have come on this pilgrimage to Quebec today. I invite you to welcome them as these words of the Holy Father are for you also : *“I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord”. The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: “Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace”. How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost! Let me say this once more: God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy”* (Evangelii gaudium, No. 3).

I am a firm believer that the renewal of the Church and the renewal of the world we live in, requires that we be renewed, restored in our faith. May the Holy Spirit guide us to the holiness we are called to. May the Blessed Mother of our Lord, Mother of the Church lead us by the example of her life and her prayer to a renewed fervor.

I would like to conclude by this prayer that Pope Francis has given us. An inspiring prayer that helps us look towards the future with Hope :

Mary, Virgin and Mother, you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,
welcomed the word of life in the depths of your humble faith :
as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,
help us to say our own “yes” to the urgent call,
as pressing as ever, to proclaim the good news of Jesus.
Filled with Christ’s presence,
you brought joy to John the Baptist,
making him exult in the womb of his mother.
Brimming over with joy,
you sang of the great things done by God.
Standing at the foot of the cross with unyielding faith,
you received the joyful comfort of the resurrection,
and joined the disciples in awaiting the Spirit
so that the evangelizing Church might be born.
Obtain for us now a new ardour born of the resurrection,
that we may bring to all the Gospel of life which triumphs over death.
Give us a holy courage to seek new paths,
that the gift of unfading beauty may reach every man and woman.

Virgin of listening and contemplation, Mother of love,
Bride of the eternal wedding feast, pray for the Church,
whose pure icon you are, that she may never be closed in on herself or lose her passion
for establishing God’s kingdom.
Star of the new evangelization,
help us to bear radiant witness to communion,
service, ardent and generous faith, justice and love of the poor,
that the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the earth,
illuminating even the fringes of our world.
Mother of the living Gospel,
wellspring of happiness for God’s little ones, pray for us.

Amen. Alleluia !

(Evangelii gaudium, No. 288)