

Archdiocesan Priests and Deacons:
Please use this homily the weekend of September 6-7.

Archbishop Zinkula has asked all the priests in the Archdiocese to share the following homily with their parishioners.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today's Scripture readings speak with striking clarity to the moment we face as an archdiocese. In the first reading from the Book of Wisdom, we hear a sobering truth: *"The deliberations of mortals are timid, and unsure are our plans... . Who ever knew your counsel, except you had given wisdom and sent your Holy Spirit from on high?"* In other words, our own plans are uncertain and fragile, but when God sends his Spirit, our paths are made straight.

The responsorial psalm echoes this truth with confidence and hope: *"In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge... . Prosper the work of our hands!"* Even as generations pass and circumstances change, the Lord remains faithful.

And in the Gospel, Jesus tells the crowds that being his disciples requires careful discernment, sacrifice, courage, and trust—like a builder who counts the cost before laying a foundation. Following Christ means carrying the cross, renouncing what is comfortable, and entrusting everything to him. Discipleship is costly—but it is also life-giving.

These readings speak directly into this moment in the life of our archdiocese, as we begin our pastoral planning process called *Journey in Faith*. This is not merely an administrative reorganization. It is a spiritual pilgrimage that we walk together, guided by the Holy Spirit. Like the Gospel image of building a tower, we are being asked to look honestly at our foundations and to plan wisely for what lies ahead.

That honesty includes acknowledging the current realities. There have been dramatic shifts in population, culture, and finances within our archdiocese. We are using only 37% of our church capacities each weekend. Since 2006, Mass attendance is down 46% throughout the archdiocese. These are the facts we must confront so we can discern how to best carry forward our mission. If we are to

build something lasting for our children, grandchildren, and generations to come, we must face these challenges with faith and courage.

I know this process will not be easy. Change always comes with challenge, and even with loss. But if the goal is a Church alive with the joy of the Gospel—if it means our parishes and schools will be stronger and more vibrant centers of mission and encounter—then it is worth the cost. We are not giving things up simply for the sake of letting go, but so that something new and life-giving can take root.

That is why your voice is so important. This month, there will be regional information sessions for parishioners to learn more about the *Journey in Faith* process. In the months of October and November, there will be two additional sessions in each parish or cluster. I encourage you to attend these sessions. I need you—your insights, your concerns, your hopes, your honest feedback. What matters most is the Spirit speaking through you, the Body of Christ and the People of God.

Please come to the sessions with an open heart. Come willing to listen. Come ready to imagine what God can do in us and through us. Together, we can be a Church that not only survives, but thrives in mission.

My dear friends, the road ahead will take courage, patience, and trust. But let's remember the disciples on the road to Emmaus: Jesus himself walked with them, even when they didn't recognize him. He walks with us now as well—revealing himself in the Word and in the breaking of the Bread.

Let's *Journey in Faith* together, trusting that God—who has been our refuge in every age—will prosper the work of our hands and transform our archdiocese.

May God bless you. And may God bless the Archdiocese of Dubuque.