23rd   B   September 6, 2015

17/16 days now, at 4:00 pm on Tuesday the 22nd, a great man with a big heart will step off a jet at Washington Dulles Airport. Pope Francis is a busy man, but I have managed—and this was not easy—I have arranged to connect with him by skype. (Let me pull him in.) Here he is, Pope Francis (bobblehead). "Holy Father, could you sneak in a visit to Cincinnati? We would pay your hotel bill."   "No?"   "Pope Francis, we know you will be in Philadelphia for the World Meeting of Families. What would you like to tell our parish about families?"   ["*All civilization passes through the family. Healthy families make a healthy civilization.*"]

"Thank you Pope Francis, for your simple words of wisdom! Safe travel; we love you and welcome you to the United States!"

For those who cannot travel to Philadelphia to meet Pope Francis at the World Meeting of Families, we are having a one-day Family Conference at Comboni Mission Center on October 10.

One way to have healthy families, of course, is to have healthy marriages. So I offer to our married people these two promises for your reflection. The <u>first</u> is the promise that every Catholic couple signs at the end of their marriage preparation: *We in the presence of one another…hold marriage to be a lifelong , faithful union and process of choosing each other for the mutual and total sharing of our life and our love. It is a union which is open to children. In is a union which is modeled after and symbolizes God's ever-faithfu love for His people. It is a partnership of the totality of life and love that we seek and to which we will publicly give our consent in marriage.*

The second promise married couples make will be more familiar: *I, take you, to be my husband/my wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.*

May the Pope's visit to the World Meeting of Families encourage us all, because "all civilization passes through the family."

Actually, Pope Francis visited our country last night/Friday night— in an interactive teleconference with groups of Americans. The 200 or so invited guests in Los Angeles were not dignitaries, not wealthy benefactors, not actors or business leaders. All of them either lived at or worked at one of nine homeless shelters in Los Angeles. They dressed in their best for the pope to see them. I thought of today's second reading, from St. James: "If a poor person in shabby clothes comes in to your assembly, will you say, stand over there?"

To these homeless people, Francis said, "I want to meet you all!...Closeness is very special…it is easier for me to understand you…Jesus was born as a homeless person."   Then he added, "We are all responsible for everyone! No one can say "my responsibility ends here."

St. James goes on to say, "Did not God choose those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him?" Far from avoiding or condemning those in shabby clothes, Pope Francis seeks them out. He wants to meet them. He writes in the Joy of the Gospel, *"I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us..in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them….We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them, and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them. 198.*

This from a man who regularly talked to people in the slums in Buenos Aires and whose visit to our country will include an elementary school in Harlem and a correctional facility. He wants us to get to know poor people and indeed writes that "the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care. The great majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship…."

This pope goes <u>toward</u> people in shabby clothes. How could our parish do the same?