

Vigil for Bishop Richard Garcia, RIP. - Madonna Del Sasso, Salinas, California. Homily – Bishop Sylvester Ryan, Retired Bishop.

Readings: Acts 17:24-28

Gospel: John 15: 1-17

A story: there is an interesting note of caution in the world of episcopal appointments whenever the question arises, “Who will be our next Bishop”: no bishop of a diocese gets to choose his own successor. This is not a written, or official directive – it’s just the way the process seems to work!

So when we were waiting to hear who would be my successor I received a letter from the Nuncio in Washington D.C. asking whom I thought would make a good bishop for Monterey, I was surprised. But I thought, well, he’s asking, so maybe it might help. I wrote in my return letter, the name, Bishop Richard Garcia, Auxiliary Bishop of Sacramento. After I sent the letter, I thought, should I really have done that? Maybe it will hurt his chances.

But on a special day in early December 2005, I received a phone call from the Nuncio - Here's how it went: "Bishop Ryan, the Holy Father has appointed Bishop Richard Garcia as your successor to serve as the Bishop of Monterey! " Wow! It's happened.

But then the Nuncio said, in a puzzled voice, "He doesn't know it yet because we can't find him." Eventually they found him and we had our bishop.

And what a bishop! Now I would like to suggest that among the many, qualities we think of when speaking of our Bishop Rich, here's one you may have missed: He was a Good Thief! He stole hearts, our hearts. And we were complicit: , we let him.

But he left us his keys, a huge ring of keys to all the persons, parishes, organizations, works, projects, and achievements to which and for which he spent his time as our Bishop. They're passkeys and all of us have any number of them, from one to many. We are grieving: we have lost a brother bishop, our bishop, the father of our diocese, and friend. His absence from among us leaves an aching impact. But grief can heal, and grief also can transform. Although he is absent, his heritage remains, vital and critical for the Diocese.

Now we need to embrace a responsibility toward the multiple works initiated by our Bishop. Our keys all together remind us to pick up where Bishop Rich has left off, and to take his achievements to an even greater level all the while remembering his ministry had one overriding priority – people!

Whatever the particular work in which any of us shared in the diocese, ultimately it has to remain about people. Moreover, these keys are forged of more than human effort.

In the Book of Acts Saint Paul preaches that a Gospel message not his own, but God's. Bishop Rich treasured Paul's address to the wise men of Greece, ***"For in him we live and move and have our being."***

And what was true of our Bishop is true of how we must continue in his name: we heard it in the Gospel: ***"it was not you who chose me but I chose you and appointed you to bear fruit, fruit that will remain – this I command you, love one another."*** So if we choose to move forward to continue the Bishop's heritage, his graced legacy, we will advance only as we welcome the spirit of Christ to accompany and guide us.

All of us represent almost every corner of Bishop Rich's passion for serving people. So you have your own key, your portion of the heritage of his beloved presence in our diocese. Mark that portion as your personal contribution to advancing the kingdom of God in this diocese with an abiding gratitude for Bishop Rich as the inspiration he embodied in his twelve years. May he rest in peace!