

Installation of The Rev. Lorna Erixson as Rector of St. Mark's Church in Mendham, NJ

Sermon by Sister Eleanor Francis

We are here today to celebrate the installation of Lorna Erixson as the rector of St. Mark's. I know you had a Search Committee who worked long and hard. I remember when you were down to three candidates and we at the Convent were asking each other on a daily basis "Have you heard anything about St. Mark's?" Well, you know it wasn't surprising because St. Mark's and the Community of St. John Baptist have a long-standing relationship. Lorna will, God willing, be in the next group to become CSJB Associates on Commemoration Day. They will be lucky to have our bishop Carlye Hughes, bless their shiny new medals. Before Lorna, St. Mark's had Shawn Carty, before him there was a considerable interim period with Charles Rice at the helm. Before him, there was Scott Hoogerhyde before him Carr Holland, before him, Philip Watters, before him, E.C Bogess., before him, Harris Hall. Every one of these priests was a CSJB Associate. Of course, many parishioners are and have been CSJB Associates as well. One of the reasons for this is no one can complain that it takes too long to commute from the church to the convent. Sisters, most notably Sr. Barbara Jean, have a long history of serving at St. Mark's.

Now, in choosing Lorna, I believe you made an excellent choice for St. Mark's. However, there is further news. The installation is not really about Lorna. The authorized ministries of bishop, priest, and deacon exist only to serve and support the ministry of all God's people. Essentially, they are representational ministries. Authorized ministers represent the people of God and have no existence independent of the rest of the Body of Christ. They are signs of the ministry that is alive and well in the Christian community. This installation is about every parishioner here at St. Mark's. Jesus says "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last." And what does that fruit look like? In his letter to the Romans, Paul says famously: "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter in exhortation."

One of Paul's favorite thoughts is of the Christian Church as a body The members of the body neither argue with each other nor envy each other nor dispute about their relative importance.

Each part of the body carries out its own function. It was Paul's conviction that the Christian Church should be like that. Each member has a task to do; and it is only when each contributes the help of his own task that the body of the Church functions as it ought. The difference between Christians is not that some have spiritual gifts and some do not. The difference is that we have not all received the same gift. The unity in a community is not uniformity. That means that not every Christian will have the gift of preaching or of teaching or of social action or of caring for church property. But every Christian does have some gift. While there is a diversity of gifts, there are no negligible gifts. There are no gifts of God the community can afford to ignore.

In order for each of us to contribute to the Church, we first need to know what we can do. That requires humility, that is a stance that is without conceit and also without false modesty. Humility urges us to use the gifts God has given us. Every person has his/her own gifts. It may be for writing sermons, building houses, sowing seeds, fashioning wood, working with figures, playing the piano, singing songs, teaching children, cooking, organizing projects. It is something given each person by God. We are not to envy someone else's gift and regret that some other gift has not been given to us. We are to accept ourselves as we are. One of the main functions of a Christian leader is to discover the gifts of each person in the group and enable them to use their gifts for the good of the whole community.

Once in a while, as a member of a religious community, I have participated in an exercise in which we look for all the qualities a Superior should have or even all the qualities a new Novice should have. We could do the same thing trying to list all the qualities the rector of a parish should have. We would find that not even Jesus Christ would qualify to be in any of these positions. A similar test that people ask is: "What do you wish they had taught in seminary that they didn't teach?" Many people will name something practical like "They didn't teach us how to fix a boiler." Now that is a real consideration, especially if you are in a small church where the priest is expected to do almost anything. But more necessary than any practical skill is a life of prayer. That's not just skimming through Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, but praying a prayer that runs deep—deep into the heart. A prayer that tells a priest who's actually in charge. The busier a clergyperson becomes, the more they need to take time for prayer. Learning *about* religion, theology, or spirituality may strengthen a person, but it cannot substitute for actual experience of the holy, gleaned through prayer. Prayer can take many different forms, which we

don't have time to go into now but all of them are intended to make us more open to the presence of God. Yes, prayer can be difficult. But what better way is there to spend our time?

Jesus said to his disciples, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love." " God loves us just as we are. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more. There is nothing we can do to make God love us less. God loves each of us as though we were the only person in the world to love. God does not have a schedule or a time limit. Even our spiritual directors will end our time with them after an hour or so, but God is always there for us. God doesn't go by the clock, but by Kairos, that time which is not chronological, but sees that things happen when they need to happen. Knowing that, how can we fail to turn to God in prayer?

I know that there are a number of good ministries here. There is Bible study, there is healing prayer, there is a Confirmation class, there is fantastic cooking, and there is Evensong followed by ice cream in the summer months. St. Mark's supports the food pantry in Morristown and the Angel Tree project at Christmastime. St. Mark's, you are doing well. There is one thing I wonder. Is there anything you could do to extend your ministry into the larger community-- Whether that means people coming here to meet or you going out? Whatever you chose to do, you will do it well.

St. Mark's, may God bless you!