

Homily033119

## HAVE YOU STOPPED LOOKING?

(This homily was delivered in the Church of Santa Isabel in Mexicali, Mexico,  
in Spanish, on the 31st of March 2019.)

My friends,

The second of January of this year I arrived from Philadelphia to spend three months in Mexicali to experience an immersion in Mexican culture and the Spanish language. Today is my last Sunday here in Mexico. This Sunday I will celebrate Mass in the parish church. This gives me the opportunity to thank Father Francisco for his warm hospitality and his acceptance, not as a visitor here during the last three months, but as a member of his parish family.

In my parish in Philadelphia, I am the pastor, and it is time for my return and be the good pastor one more time for my people. In the Gospel for Sunday we read that every day the father goes by the way of his house to the street. He searched for a long time. He looks for days and weeks and months and then years. Every day he returns to his house. Sad. Until one day. Then, while his son was still far away, his father saw him. He runs to his daughter and hugged him. All that time looking finally was worth it.

Every day. The father will search. He never stops. So here's the question for us: Have you stopped looking? Or better yet, for whom have you stopped looking? Why have you stopped looking? Why have you given in? Have you stopped looking--for a change of heart? For yourself or for a family member or a friend? Have you given up a dream or a hope? Have you stopped looking for an answer to your prayer? Have you surrendered in prayer? Have you stopped believing in prayer?

I am seventy-one years old. My dream was to come here to learn Spanish. I have learned much. I have not been completely successful. It is not important. Not giving up is important. When we stop looking; we die. Slowly maybe but we die. You cannot see your faith but I can. It shows in your faces. It is evident in the way you participate in the Mass. I hear it in your song (and I've discovered how much people like to sing in Mexico!). And especially your young people. I wish I could take you to my parish. I've recorded some of your songs to do just that.

Here is the thing. My dream about learning Spanish has brought me so many other things that moved me and changed me and strengthened me. Visiting twice the monastery of the Clarisian Sisters a contemplative group of Franciscan nuns in the spirit of Saint Clare living literally in the desert below Mexicali, an oasis of love and beauty and simplicity and faith. Visiting the local Catholic schools, the Geronimo Usera school and the school of Anglo Americans. Being able to be present for the ordination of Deacon Max to the priesthood, after living next to him in the Rectory for three months, and participate in it. A wonderful little visit to the Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe two weeks ago.

And your food. I love your food. I really did not have any expectations and I tried to eat a little of everything. The only food that I probably would not eat again was menudo. Apart from that, your food and I, we get along very well.

Here is another thing that I have learned. We share the same faith in Jesus Christ. Exactly. We may not express it in exactly the same way, but faith and love are the same. And the people are the same. There are saints and sinners everywhere. But I have come to know this truth. I am a sinner but I want to be a saint. I have learned that every saint - has a past. And every sinner - has a future. Let's live in hope.

Many years ago, as a young priest, different people came to me and asked me to pray for them or for a family member who was sick. I would always say "Yes", of course, but I often forget to pray for them or for their intention. Finally I got a small notebook that fit in my shirt pocket. Every time someone asked me, I took it out and wrote his name and the reason for the prayer. I've been doing it for more than forty-five years. I still do it.

And today I wrote the names of this parish and the communities that worship in each of the parish chapels on my prayer list. Every Sunday morning I read all the names on the list. Now it takes me about forty-five minutes to read the names. But it brings me so much happiness and peace. And for a brief moment I can remember and pray for all those who have touched my life and made me a good priest. I am very grateful. And when you think about it, from time to time, pray an Ave Maria for me. May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.

Peace, my friends, it is good to be back home.  
Monsignor McHenry