

Homily for the Silver Priest Jubilee

of Director-General Fr. Bernd Biberger

Mount Schoenstatt, Adoration Church June 19, 2018

Dear Jubilarian, Dear Sisters of Mary, Dear Parents and Relatives and Course Brothers of Bernd Biberger, dear Friends,

How many of you, I drove past this morning as, with joy, we came to Berg Schoenstatt to the Silver Priestly Jubilee of Fr. Bernd Biberger. It is a great pleasure to celebrate this feast here in our Adoration Church, which was allowed to celebrate its golden jubilee recently. In advance, Fr. Biberger communicated to me the biblical texts which he has chosen very consciously for this Mass. These strong biblical witnesses have been with me in recent weeks. I would like to invite you, dear Bernd and you all, to follow the three paths that are spoken of in these biblical texts.

1. The path of Abraham to Mount Moriah

First there is the path of Abraham up to Mount Moriah. It is familiar to us all from the reading on Holy Saturday and it is a familiar word here in Schoenstatt through the father-house of the diocesan priests' institute to which our Jubilarian belongs since 1990. In the biblical tradition, this path establishes the experience that God also offers human beings difficult and challenging paths. The God of Israel is leading a path that raises questions for those who want to go on it as it did for Abraham and for the people around them, Sarah, and little Isaac. Abraham cannot give his Isaac a conclusive answer. "God will provide," is the daring answer to his Isaac and from this word is the name of the mountain "Moriah" formed.

For our Jubilarian, "Moriah" combines the experience of a laborious and sacrificial career with long years of study toward a doctorate and post-doctoral work. When both had been achieved and a path to teaching at a university was within reach, every door that seemed to be open closed again. Into this dark time came the request for the task to be the director-general in the community of the Sisters of Mary. In retrospect, it became apparent that the reluctance not to continue on the path to teaching opened the way to greater fruitfulness in world-wide effectiveness within the Secular Institute of the Marian Sisters. It is worth reading Moriah's story in Gen 22 to the end, where there is mention of an overwhelming blessing. (Our Father does that in Heavenwards.)

2. The "preeminent path" of love

The second reading from the letter of the apostle Paul to the congregation in Corinth speaks of a path; even of a "preeminent path" that Paul wants to show his readers. In Corinth there are obviously many talents and obvious charisms at that time. This had led to tensions and unrest among the early Christians. Particularly noticeable charisms, such as the gift of speaking in tongues and the gift of healing were overestimated in the community. For Paul, love is and will remain the fundamental and supreme gift of grace. With this intention he writes in his 13th

chapter of the 1st letter to the Corinthians an exalted song about love. Everything in it aims at the statement at the chapter: the greatest is love.

This statement was already the parent's promise on their wedding day and keeps them together until today in good and in bad days. The same central statement of St. Paul was also chosen by our Jubilarian 25 years ago for the motto at his first Mass after his priestly ordination. Both sacraments of the Church want to be lived and realized out of this innermost center. And it is truly worth a feast and solemn Mass when, after 25 years, a married couple and a priest celebrate the day of their marriage or priesthood with a Silver Jubilee and make it clear that they wish to continue on the path of love.

And something else connects the life of our Jubilee with the motif of the path and of love. It is more concealed and hidden in the Greek phrase "parepidemos agápe", the ideal of his course in our community of the priesthood. Bernd Biberger did not want to live his priesthood as a lone fighter and soloist. Already in the course of his theological studies, he sought contact with the brothers in the priests' institute. On the way to the community of the Institute they discovered together more and more originally, what the pilgrimage and the community of love is all about. I do not want to reveal more. But I am very happy that confreres from their course celebrate with us today and make this community of love visible.

3. The path to the mountain of the Magnificat

Finally, the Gospel for our jubilee Mass speaks of a path, the way of Mary up to the mountains to Elizabeth. It is a gospel that plays a role in the home parish of Fr Biberger. Blaubeuren celebrates the feast of the Visitation of Mary every year on July 2 with a great pilgrimage in honor of the Blessed Mother. Our father and founder took part in this traditional pilgrimage twice from Ennabeuren. This Gospel about the path of Mary up to Jerusalem has been familiar to our Jubilarian since childhood and he has chosen it for our festive Mass, not least so that the Blessed Mother may also come into view for this jubilee. According to the Gospel of St. Luke, it is the path that Mary takes upon herself after the hour of her Annunciation to visit her cousin Elisabeth. In order to make the unbelievable believable for Mary in the hour of the Annunciation, the angel Gabriel had spoken of her relative Elisabeth, who had conceived a child even in her old age. So Mary is on her way over the mountains.

While visiting a member of the Focolare Movement in the pastoral area of Oberkirch, I discovered a small painting in the parish house. It shows Mary alone on the way across the mountains with a pilgrim's staff in hand. It is a small picture that was painted by the father of Bishop Hemmerle as a young man and given to his bride. There is a wonderful sermon by Bishop Hemmerle about this for those called to go the path to marriage and those called to go the path of virginity.

At the end of her journey in the house of Zachariah, Mary is allowed to convince herself that the sign that the angel gave her is true. Yes, she is allowed to experience that Elisabeth is the first to recognize her calling and addresses her as the "Mother of the Lord". Then Mary begins to sing the Magnificat so familiar to us. It is the thank-you song for the vocation of Mary, the song of thanks for every Christian vocation.

Today, dear Bernd, you are invited to join in the great Magnificat of Our Lady. Like Mary, you may rejoice that God has done great things for you. Today, for us, Berg Schoenstatt with its large church of worship is the place of the Magnificat. Today we are pleased be invited to join you on this mountain with Mary in giving thanks for your vocation. Amen.

Dr. Peter Wolf