### **Homily for Choral Evensong at Diocesan Convention “Remembering Our Why”**

My brothers and sisters of the Diocese of Southwest Floriday…We gather tonight at the end of a long day. The bright light of day has given way to more mellow tones of dusk.

Our conversations have quieted – (and not only because some of us have already slipped away to dinner.   
For those of us gathered…the setting of the sun means that and at last — finally — we can stop doing –  
and simply be.

All day we have been busy with good and holy things —   
learning, sharing, dreaming of what the Church might yet become.

Tomorrow we will take up the work again —  
the reports, the resolutions, the votes, the conversations that matter.

But before we turn toward tomorrow,  
We pause – here on the threshold of what has been…and what will be…and..  
We breathe.  
We pray.

**Because before we do the work of the Church…  
we must return…to the heart of the Church.**

And what is that heart of the Church?  
It is not a place, or a program…not a meeting or a plan…  
but rather…the living presence of God in the midst of his people.   
It is where worship begins,  
where love is rekindled,  
where the scattered threads of our days  
are gathered back into the hands of God.   
**It is there that we remember who we are…  
and whose we are.**

Evensong is the invitation to do just that.  
It is the hour when light softens,  
when striving ceases,  
and when our prayers….the prayers of the Church  
rise like incense to the one who created us.

Tonight we are not delegates or committees,  
not parishes, or missions or diocesan staff —  
but simply the people of God at prayer,  
intentionally breathing again the breath of the Spirit.

If you have ever been long enough in a congregation where I have served…you know how much I love the ancient collect that gathers us week after week for Holy Eucharist…

“*Almighty God, unto whom… all hearts are open,  
all desires… known,  
and from whom… no secrets are hid:  
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts…****by the inspiration*** *of your Holy Spirit.”*

How many times have you heard this prayer? Said this prayer? And did you catch it?? By the *inspiration*   
it doesn’t mean simply to be inspired…or inspired by…   
it comes from the **Latin *inspirare***, which means…

“*to breathe or blow into*.”

Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the…**inspiration** of your Holy Spirit…. means *to breathe in* the very Spirit of God!  
That is what prayer does…and that is what this hour gives us:  
a chance to inhale the very life of God again,  
and to exhale…to let go of…what clutters our soul.

What is cluttering your soul right now? What would it be to breathe in…and as we do…to take in the power of the Holy Spirit…

to breathe in holiness…

to let the Spirit reorder what has grown weary within us.

The work of renewal never begins in our committees or our plans… but in our hearts…  
in the turning of our souls toward God.

Only when we are centered there  
can all our work find its true purpose.

Paul writing to the church in Corinth reminded them:

*“The body does not consist of one member, but of many.”*He was teaching them what we already know in our bones:  
that the life of the Church is never found in one place,  
one kind of ministry, or one kind of people.

Our congregations are different—  
coastal and inland,  
large and small,  
some blessed with abundance,  
others serving in places of real struggle—  
and yet every one of them  
breathes with the same Spirit.

Each congregation and each person brings something holy to the whole—  
a strength that sustains us,  
a wisdom that shapes us,  
a story that reveals how God’s grace is alive among us.

Paul wrote to a church that was full of passion,  
but also full of competition and comparison.  
They had forgotten that they belonged to one another.  
And sometimes we forget, too.  
We may not be divided by doctrine,  
but we can feel separated by geography,  
by resources,  
by the quiet fatigue that ministry sometimes brings.

But when we come to prayer,  
those separations begin to fade.  
All our voices rise together;  
what was many becomes one.

And that, perhaps,  
is the truest work of Evensong—  
that in worship,  
the scattered pieces of the Body of Christ  
are gathered again into wholeness before God.

Psalm 141 gives us that image in another way:

“*Let my prayer be set forth in your sight as incense,  
and the lifting up of my hands  
as the evening sacrifice*.”

Evensong is not a ritual we attend,  
but an offering we make —  
a giving of ourselves to God.

Our time together at this convention…our energy…our will —  
all of it must rise like incense,  
a fragrant offering purified by prayer.

It means that our decisions, if they are to bear the mark of Christ, must be born not of strategy alone…  
but of prayer.

**They must rise from hearts made tender  
by time in God’s presence**.  
Otherwise, we risk doing the work of the Church  
without the Spirit of the Church.

Tonight — we offer **ourselves**…**before** we offer our motions or our plans.  
It is what makes this gathering holy.

Tomorrow will bring its necessary business,  
and that work will be good.  
But tonight,  
we remember **why** we do it at all.

Not for programs…or structures…or success —  
but because we belong  
to the God who has already made us one —  
the God whose love is both our beginning and our end.

Evensong is the Church breathing —  
exhaling what the day has carried,  
inhaling the peace of Christ.

And in that rhythm we remember:  
**before we do the work of the Church,  
we must return  
to the heart of the Church** —  
**to the praise of God,  
to the presence that steadies us,  
and to the love that makes us one**.

Amen.