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**Homily for the Funeral Mass of Fr. Francis Martin  
St. Paul Parish, Damascus, MD  
August 17, 2017  
Rev. Joseph E. Rogers**

Your Excellency Bishop Knestout, Monsignor Fisher, Fr. Pierce, Rev. Monsignors, brother priests, deacons, religious and consecrated, Bob, Nancy and the beloved McCambridge family, members of the Mother of God Community, Tom Singer (MOG Coordinator), brothers and sisters:

*Dei verbum religiose audiens et fidenter proclamans . . .* “Hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith” – these words that begin the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, at once summarize for us the pilgrimage of faith that we are all called to walk each and every time the word of God is proclaimed to us, and they specify for us with simplicity and depth the gift of the priestly life of Father Francis Martin, whom we commemorate today in the offering of the most holy sacrifice of the Mass for his eternal rest.

My brother and sisters, Jesus is alive! And His Spirit is in our midst! For this reason, we must proclaim: *Alleluia!* “For what marks the Church is that she is at once human and divine, visible and endowed with invisible realities, gloriously active and yet making space in her life for contemplation, present in the world and yet in pilgrimage beyond – all this, moreover, in such a way that the human within her is ordered and subordinated to the divine, and likewise the visible to the invisible, activity to contemplation, and the present to the city of the future which we seek” – so states the Dogmatic Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sancrosanctum Concilium* (2; trans. N. Tanner [minor adjustments]; Vol. II, p. 820). Jesus Christ is present to His Church and in His Church, especially in the sacred liturgy, most fully in the Holy Eucharist, and “He is present through His word, in that He Himself is speaking when Scripture is read in the Church” (SSC 7).

Let us ponder this mystery: Jesus is present in His Church. He speaks, He teaches, He heals, delivers, and elevates “when Scripture is read in the Church.” To echo the Prophet Isaiah, Jesus makes straight the wasteland of our lives. He fills in the valleys of our despair and pain. He makes low the mountains of our pride. He makes plain the rugged land and rough country of our sins. The “glory of the Lord is revealed,” “He is present in His word . . . He Himself is speaking” (DV 7) to those who have set their hearts on “hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith” (1). This is the liturgical-missionary identity of the Church. This is the call of the Lord Jesus to the baptized and a glimpse into the soul of Fr. Francis Martin: Jesus is present in His word and delights in those who hear Him with reverence and proclaim Him with faith.

That was the introduction. Now, don’t get nervous. Maybe I should introduce myself.

My name is Fr. Joe Rogers, a priest of the Archdiocese of Washington and pastor of St. John Neumann Parish. I met Fr. Francis in August of 1999 as a new graduate student at the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family. After graduating from college and working for five years in international sales and marketing, I had sensed the Lord calling me to be immersed in the writings and vision of Pope St. John Paul II. The two years at the Institute transformed my life, and Fr. Francis was among the brightest luminaries of the Lord’s work. I still remember my first day of class. Monday afternoon, a program with very few students at the time, but this class was packed: priests, religious and laity from wall to wall. The professor walked in – a Catholic priest – and opened his Bible. I noticed that he opened it backwards and began reading from right to left –

-- *Totus Tuus!* --

not left to right. Then he proclaimed in his Brooklyn-North-Jerusalem-Rabbinical accent: *bərēʔšīt bārāʔ ʔēlōhīm ʔēt haššāmáyim wəʔēt hāʔāreš* (Gen 1:1); to which I responded: “Gesundheit.” Fr. Francis smiled: “In this class the Lord is going to heal your epistemology.” I had heard two sentences. One was not in English, which I did not understand. The other *was* in English, which I also did not understand. My Economics degree had not prepared me for this. On break I asked my new classmates, “So, how is your epistemology? Have you visited your epistemologist recently?”

More importantly, something very profound happened to me that day. The word of God had been proclaimed to my soul. I got it. I knew it. This wasn’t ancient writing with strange names and anachronous metaphors. God was speaking. The word of God – the Bible – had become the living Word of God! The proclamation of the word with faith – *fidenter proclamans* – even in a language I did not understand – had pierced my soul. For the rest of the year we could not wait to be in Fr. Francis’ class. It didn’t matter the topic, the chapter, the homework, or if the AC was working. We knew the word would be alive. We knew that Christ was the living Word behind every word of the Bible; that the Old and New Testaments belonged to Him; that each page was alive with the Gospel. It truly is the Word of God! From my classes with Fr. Francis I discovered a thirst for the Scriptures, a hunger, and a desire to study and share them; so did many others; so did many of you. According to his personal testimony, Fr. Francis knew from the age of seven he was called to be a preacher of the word. Thank you, Lord, for placing that gift in his heart.

Isaiah the prophet writes, *ûḏəḇar-ʔēlōhénû yāqûm ləʔólām*, “The word of our God stands firm forever” (Isaiah 40:8). The creative word that God spoke *ex nihilo* – “Let there be light, and there was light” – had the power to recreate, to choose people – prophets – and even a nation – to announce this word to others, to bring liberty to captives, sight to the blind, a year of favor to the poor. And this same creative word – according to St. John Chrysostom – “condescended” into Scripture so that the word could be proclaimed to future generations, to us: “Go up onto a high mountain, Zion, herald of glad tidings; cry out at the top of your voice, Jerusalem, she-who-proclaims-Good-News! Be not afraid to cry out to the cities of Judah [to Gaithersburg, Damascus, MV, Baltimore, Washington, Steubenville, New York, and LA], ‘Here is your God! Here He comes with power the Lord GOD, who rules by His strong arm’” (Isaiah 40:9-11). The word of God stands firm forever because God is present in His word and His word is efficacious, accomplishing that for which it is sent (cf. Isaiah 55:1 ff.). In this line of perception, St. John the Apostle pierces the mystery, passing beyond the veil of Isaiah, in his Prologue: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [. . .] And the Word became-flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:1-2.14). “The grass withers, the flower wilts [but] the word of our God stands forever.” “And we have seen His glory” (Jn 1:14). “Come let us adore Him.” “Who is this whom even the wind and the sea obey?” (Mt 8:27). “Truly, You are the Son of God” (Mt 14:43). “Master, to whom shall we go?” (Jn 6:68). “Father, forgive them” (Lk 23:34). “Today you will be with me in paradise.” “Woman, behold Your son.” “It is finished” (Jn 19:30). The “word of our God stands forever” incarnate in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Mary, crucified for us risen in glory!

My brothers and sisters, for this we must proclaim, Alleluia! *Alleluia!*

Fr. Francis learned as a young Cistercian monk that the word of God “remains forever” – that Jesus Himself “is present and is speaking” – in the prayer of the Church. He experienced the

“standing” nature of the word, its capacity to build communion with others and closeness to God, especially in the monastic recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours. “The liturgy,” he once wrote, “is the native home of Scripture.” The Church is the sacred place where, as Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has taught, “the Bible is always in the present.” Christ prays through His Church, “He is present and He Himself is speaking” (DV7) in His word. So, let us ask: what did Jesus tell us today?

Today’s Gospel begins, “Jesus said to His disciples . . .” Did we hear that? “Jesus said to his disciples” – that means Jesus is speaking to us, now, here, in the ecclesial proclamation of the word. Jesus tells us, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth [ . . . ]. [Y]ou know Him because He remains with you and will be in you.” Jesus is telling us that the Holy Spirit is within us and accompanies us so that we might follow Jesus whom we can see with the eyes of faith: “In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live.” Jesus lives risen in glory, and we live in Him. “On that day,” Jesus tells us, “you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I [am] in you”. In his commentary on the Gospel of John co-authored with William Wright, Fr. Francis teaches, “Through the Spirit, God comes to dwell in the heart of Jesus’ disciples, much as the Father dwells in Jesus and Jesus dwells in the Father (cf. Jn 14:11). [ . . . ] A new relationship of communion and indwelling will be created between the risen Jesus and the disciples: ‘You are in me and I [am] in you.’ [ . . . ] Jesus’ commands and his interior prompting through the Holy Spirit lead believers to an inner place where Jesus can reveal himself. This is his promise [ . . . ] fulfilled in the gift of the Holy Spirit. [ . . . ] God’s dwelling in Jesus’ disciples after the resurrection is a genuine, present sharing in heavenly life” (Francis Martin and William Wright IV, *The Gospel of John*, pp. 248-250). My brothers and sisters, Amen, Alleluia! The indwelling of the Spirit is the seed of heaven. This is why Fr. Francis would call the Holy Spirit the “Life-Changer” – He changes us from within! God comes to dwell in us through the Spirit. “The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us” (Rom 5:5). We are temples of God! We are, as St. Theresa of Avila taught, “interior castles,” where, through a life of prayer and penance, conversion and adoration, sacred study, service, and mission we are called to become the dwelling place of God! Jesus is alive in us through the Spirit!

Fr. Francis Martin was a man of the Spirit. In fact, after several years as a Cistercian, the Lord guided him to the Angelicum and Biblicum in Rome, to the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem, and by way of the Charismatic Renewal to Madonna House in Canada. His desire to follow the Spirit and to preach the word would eventually lead him to the Mother of God Community in Gaithersburg, which he formally joined in 1988. His years at Mother of God were among his most blessed. He lived in a household, offered retreats, and preached around the world touching thousands. There were also trials of great suffering and difficulty. In the wake of much distress and pain in the community, Cardinal Hickey appointed Fr. Francis as Chaplain in 1997 and that same year, with the strong support of the Pastor of St. Paul’s Parish at the time, Fr. Pete Sweeney, he was incardinated in the Archdiocese of Washington. We are all grateful for that. Looking back, Fr. Francis must have understood that as much as his priesthood was needed in the service of the Charismatic Renewal, it would be needed more than ever by those in search of healing. “The word of our God remains forever.” The priest must also remain with his people. The shepherd cannot abandon his flock. I believe that Fr. Francis would want all of you to know, present and past

members of the community, that he loved you and that he remained with the community until the end – until his last breath – simply to serve you all as your priest, because he was your priest.

Let's return to the Gospel and to the words of Fr. Francis: "A new relationship of communion and indwelling will be created between the risen Jesus and the disciples: 'You are in me and I [am] in you.' [. . .] Jesus' commands and his interior prompting through the Holy Spirit lead believers to an inner place where Jesus can reveal himself" (Martin and Wright, p. 250). The Church in her essence – and our parishes and the ecclesial movements within her – are schools of holiness and communion so that this "inner place" "where Jesus can reveal himself" may be formed in us. Jesus calls us together. He forms us together. He teaches us together. He heals us together. He sends us together. How much he desires that we pray and walk together in faith. I remember visiting Fr. Francis not long after I first became pastor at St. John Neumann three years ago. The student was now the pastor! I told Fr. Francis that this was for his sanctification. We spoke about the Scriptures, the spiritual life of the parish, and I asked him for his blessing. Many of you know those great prayers of Fr. Francis. He prayed over me, "Lord, just bless Fr. Joe. Help him. He needs it. Maybe he doesn't really know what he's doing. But You're greater than that. And You can work through us all. Work through him, Lord. Bless him. Bless the parish. Amen." Lord, thank you for all the times that Fr. Francis prayed for us and blessed us. Please bless him.

My brothers and sisters, the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, is in our midst. As we conclude our meditation on the readings we must be sure to hear the words of St. Paul in Romans, chapter 8. "If the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the One who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through His Spirit that dwells in you" (Rom 8:11). "The word of our God stands forever," and the resurrection of the body is the last word – God's word. Pope St. John Paul II writes, "The Triune God [. . .] giving himself to man, transforms the world from within, from inside hearts and minds. Along this path, the world, made to share in the divine gift, becomes [. . .] 'ever more human' [. . .] while within the world, through [our] hearts and minds, the Kingdom develops in which God will be 'all in all' (1Cor 15:28): as gift and love. Gift and love: this is the eternal power of the opening of the Triune God to man and the world, in the Holy Spirit" (St. John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem* 59). Gift and love: this is the truth of the resurrection, the power of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the power "of the One who raised Jesus from the dead" who will give life to our mortal bodies. "The word of our God remains forever." The resurrection of the body is the ultimate gift, the final act of Eternal Love. One last story: the night that Fr. Francis was called home by the Lord many of us were struck by the icon at the foot of his bed. It depicted the scene of Moses on Mt. Sinai before the burning bush. In the icon, the bush is set aflame with the Spirit and present within the flame is Our Lady, the Mother of God, bearing the Christ-Child within Her. The hagiographer seems to say, "Behold the power of a life immersed in the Word and ablaze with the Spirit. Behold, your Mother!"

My brothers and sisters, as we gather at the Altar to thank the Lord for the priestly life and ministry of Fr. Francis Martin, let us ask Our Lady to receive him in Her Maternal Heart and Womb and to guide us to be immersed in the fire of the Spirit and the light of the Word, of which She is the perfect, living icon in the totality of Her being: *Dei verbum religiose audiens et fidenter proclamans* – "Hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith." Amen.