**Homily for FSM Inauguration: President and Vice-President**

July 15, 2007

Friends, meet James and John here. One of them is named Manny Mori, and the other is Alik Alik. Tomorrow we’ll be calling them President and Vice President. They have come forward and declared their desire to sit at the head of the table, one on the right side and the other on the left. Well, maybe it wasn’t they themselves who asked for the presidency and the vice-presidency. It might have been their supporters, their fellow congressmen. In Matthew’s account of this same passage, it’s the mother of James and John who asks Jesus if he will grant this honor to her two sons.

Whoever did the asking, the result is the same. These two men will tomorrow be inaugurated as the leaders of their nation. Therefore, the words of Jesus in this gospel passage are as applicable to them as they were to Jesus’ own disciples, especially those who had their eyes on the rewards of a place of privilege.

Jesus issues a warning and articulates an ideal, both of which are interrelated. “You don’t know what you’re asking,” Jesus tells his disciples. “You have no idea what you’re getting into–and here comes the ideal–because the people in charge are supposed to be the servants of all,” he tells them. Maybe if Jesus were speaking to our leaders today, he would tell them: “Travel Business Class if you want, and be the first off the plane and into the waiting limousine.”

But plan on also being the first into the office in the morning and the last out in the evening. Be ready to put in long work hours, be ready to explain again and again what seems obvious to you but your constituents can’t seem to grasp. Be ready to share the effect of pay cutbacks and austerity measures with the others further down the food chain–the clerks, the secretaries and the cleaning women. Prepare to be misunderstood, to be blamed for many things that are not really your fault.

But even when you are taking responsibility for anything and everything, keep your eyes lifted to heaven and a smile on your face. Now you are truly a servant of your people. Now you are drinking the cup that Jesus drank, and being baptized with his baptism. Now you’re getting the idea of what it means to surrender your life...and your reputation... and your resources... as a ransom for many.

President Mori and Vice President Alik, together with all of you government leaders, are being entrusted with a heavy burden at a difficult time in the history of FSM. Your job is nothing less than to build a nation, a task you inherited from the men who founded this country, including the two former leaders who passed away just a few months ago: Tosiwo Nakayama and John Mangefel.

An earlier generation may have founded the nation, but the task of nation-building continues. And it has probably never been more urgent than it is today. Our leaders must deal with the financial shortfalls in the government resulting from reduced Compact funding. Somehow they must step up the productivity of the government workforce, while withholding the pay increases that long-time civil servants feel they are entitled to. They may have to trim the number of employees at the very time their people most need jobs. They are required to shepherd public funds just as their fellow citizens are complaining loudly over the price of gas and electricity and everything else. Meanwhile, they are being asked to somehow grow an economy that will support their country well into the future, despite the slender resource base they have to work with in the islands. (Perhaps our FSM leaders can identify with the Israelites who, during their captivity in Egypt, were commanded to make bricks without straw.)

Above all, our leaders will have to lift the eyes of their people from their day-to-day struggles, and elevate their hearts, so that they too are prepared to give of their best to achieve these larger goals. If the country is to succeed, all voices will have to be singing the words of the FSM anthem with real meaning.

Our FSM leaders are called to be nothing less than pathfinders, charting the way through the forest for those who follow. They will have to draw on inner strength to keep up their own spirits as well as to encourage others when they’re too tired to continue. They will repeatedly be called on to put their own interests aside–even their interest in another term of office–if they are to be true to their task. They will have to be servants of their people, not just in a rhetorical sense but a real one. They will understand what it is that Jesus meant when he asked whether they could “drink of the cup that I drink of.”

But their sacrifices will not be unrewarded. They will have the guidance of the Spirit in their mission. And the gratitude of their people... perhaps not immediately, but surely in the future. And the prayers and support of all of us here. And the approval of those who sacrificed so much so that this country could be born. And, above all, the satisfaction of knowing that in serving their people honestly and faithfully, they have honored and loved their Lord.