**Reflections and Homily Hints**

* One in five Americans has a disability—physical, mental, or sensory.
* Disabilities can occur at any time in life and they increase with age.
* Most likely every fifth person you greet at church this weekend will have a disability.
* The challenge today is to increase awareness that as the Body of Christ we are called to welcome and include all of our members, especially those who are most vulnerable.
* The task today is to help all members of the parish acknowledge their own vulnerabilities―whether hidden or exposed―and see how much we need one another.
* Understanding that we all have vulnerabilities and honoring the vulnerability in others is at the heart of our Christian faith. The problem is that vulnerability is rarely welcome in our competitive culture. Messages from every corner of society encourage us to be the best, the brightest, the greatest, the swiftest, the most powerful, the most beautiful, or the most intelligent.
* It’s clear from Jesus’ ministry that we are called to be compassionately aware of the needs of others. Today as a parish we can become aware of physical or attitudinal barriers that may be preventing some of our members from sharing their gifts, and we can make plans to address these issues.
Every celebration of the Mass should remind us that we are the Body of Christ and every member has a contribution to make.

We all have a mission to create a culture of inclusion and meaningful participation for persons with disabilities and their families. We must work to educate, advocate, and assist our parishes with efforts towards establishing a better sense of belonging in our Church.

When we fail to invite, welcome, and accompany persons with disabilities in our parishes, we fail the entire family. The families we fail often leave the Church entirely. Parents and caregivers are strong advocates for family members with disabilities, and when opportunities are lacking in a parish, they seek our other faith communities to meet their spiritual needs.

Now is the ideal time to begin an important paradigm shift in our Church. It is essential that we focus on intentional accompaniment rather than reactive inclusion. As followers of Jesus, we are called to “go and make disciples of all the nations.” If we simply wait for persons with disabilities to come to us to seek accommodations and accessibility, we are failing to realize our call. Let us actively seek, welcome, and accompany persons with disabilities and their families, so that every member of the Body of Christ can live out their vocation and contribute their God-given gifts to the Church.

*Reflection from Noelle Collis DeVito, Associate Director, Office for Persons with Disabilities, Arch of Cincinnati*