

From the Deacon's Desk

Trunk or Treat:

On Tuesday October 31st, members of the Youth Ministry Team (Kaylie, Geri, Bev, Mary, and Jerry) will be at the Shepherd Trunk or Treat gathering of cars with open trunks to pass out candy to everyone who is there. Look for us under the St. Vincent de Paul Parish sign.

Whole Community Catechesis:

Next Sunday for Whole Community Catechesis, we will be discussing the topic of Gratitude as we approach the Thanksgiving Holiday. Gratitude can best be defined and understood as the only possible response to a gift, to something recognized as utterly, freely given. Gratitude is the vision—the way of seeing—that recognizes “gift.” Our culture seems to be on the verge of losing the meaning of the experience of gratitude, in part because we have lost all sense of “gift.” Our ritual occasions of giving, from traditional birthdays and anniversaries to the industry-centered special days for everyone from grandparents to secretaries to Christmas, mean that there is always a handy occasion to give “a gift”—with the result that a **true gift is never given**. For a true gift is **inspired** rather than **occasioned**.

The experience of gratitude has been lost, too, because we tend to think of it primarily as some kind of “feeling.” Feelings are fine, but they are also transient and ephemeral; gratitude is not a feeling but an ongoing vision of thank-ful-ness that recognizes the gifts constantly being received. A feeling is fleeting, an emotion for the moment; gratitude is a mind-set, a way of seeing and thinking that is rooted in remembrance of being without the gift. That means that “think” and “thank” are kindred roots of the German word “to think on.” Gratitude is the vision that **“sees”** gift and recognizes how **gift-ed** we are.

Happiness—the joy of living—comes in the experience of gratitude that flows from a vision of one's life as a reality received, a gift given freely and spontaneously. Such a vision removes self from the center, thus healing self-centeredness by revealing the folly of the illusion of control.

Maybe this is what Jesus meant when he said in all three synoptic Gospels: **“For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.”**

The sin of Adam and Eve was, first and foremost, a failure in receptivity and gratitude. God gives them life, each other, and the garden and asks them only to receive it properly, in gratitude – receive and give thanks. The original sin was precisely Adam and Eve's refusal to do this. Instead they took the apple . . . taking as by right what could only be received gratefully as gift.

It is our propensity to forget this that gets us in trouble. The failure to be properly grateful, to take as owed what is offered as a gift, lies at the root of many of our deepest resentments toward others – and their resentments toward us.

To be grateful and to be thankful are not the same thing. It's easy to be polite and not mean it. Thankfulness may consist merely of words, but gratitude is shown in acts. To nourish a spirit of gratitude requires us to repay in kind what has been done for us. The mystery of gratitude lies in the fact that it has nothing to do with things. It has something to do with the quality of the human heart.

As we prepare for next Sunday's Whole Community Catechesis after the 9:30 AM Mass, and the adult group discussion that will follow, think of gratitude in terms of: 1) a person; 2) place; 3) thing; 4) event; 5) talent; 6) a mistake or misfortune. All are welcome to attend.

Living the Eucharist: From Mass to Mission

Last Monday at our third of six sessions on understanding the Mass better, we looked at the second major part of the Mass after the Introductory Rites and Liturgy of the Word, the Offertory and Liturgy of the Eucharist. We talked about bread and wine and donations symbolizing the entirety of our life, work, and experiences. The wheat and grapes which become bread and wine represent the transformation brought on by God in each of our lives. Basically the action of bringing up the bread and wine is our saying to Christ, "Do something with this. Make our lives be what your life was and is." We also discussed the Jewish blessing prayer over the bread and wine called the "Baraka" as it reminds us that everything we have is a gift from God.

Finally we talked about the "anamnesis" or "remembering" that happens at the Eucharist, but this memory is not simply the acknowledgment of an event that happened long ago in history. Rather, it is a remembering that makes the event present for believers here and now, similar to the Passover experience for the Jewish people celebrated every year. In a similar way, whenever we gather for Eucharist, we remember the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ so that this memorial will put us into real contact with the death and resurrection event, in the present moment.

Next week in session four, we will begin to examine the Eucharist Prayer in detail. All sessions will begin with a pot luck at 6 pm (bring a dish to pass) and the presentation and group discussions will be from 6:30 until approximately 7:30/8:00 pm.

All Saints and All souls:

All Saints Day is a solemn celebration in the Roman Catholic Church and is a Holy Day of Obligation. This year all Saints Day is Wednesday, November 1 (a Holy Day of Obligation and Mass will be celebrated at 7 pm) and the very next day on Thursday November 2 is All Souls Day.

The beautiful reality about Catholicism is that we believe that death does not divide the one family under God. Some of God's people are still alive on this earth (you and me), and some of God's people are alive in the next world with the Lord. All Saints and All Souls Day celebrate the reality that we still are all God's one family.

As a way to remember and celebrate All Saints and All Souls Day, I'd like to invite you to bring pictures of your departed loved ones to display in church throughout the month of November. The pictures and photos will remind us of those members of our family who have gone before us in faith to live with the Lord. Similar to last year we will put the display up on tables near the white northwest wall of the church. Please remember to put your name on the back of the photos so we can return them to you at the end of November.

Praying with others after Mass:

As a way to follow-up on the Anointing of the Sick that was celebrated October 14 & 15 at all the Masses, if anyone is ever in need of someone to pray with you about something going on in your life or your needs, there are parishioners who are willing after Mass to pray with you. Catholics are not always used to others praying with us, and yet, it has a long tradition in the church. We have always been encouraged to pray for one another, but sometimes people keep their own need for someone to pray for them to themselves. If you ever would like someone to pray for and with you after Mass, please let me know and I'll find you a prayer-partner who is available after each weekend Mass.

Recently it has occurred to me that often people ask me to pray for them or something going on in their life, and rather than try to remember that request later on, I'm going to start praying for people on the spot (with me) when they ask. Following this same practice, we will have others at Mass always willing to pray with us when we need prayers, so just ask.