

From the PA's Desk

**Scripture Today:**

Pope Francis recently said this about the scriptures: "In Sacred Scripture, the Lord is presented as a 'merciful God.' This is his name, through which he unveils, so to speak, his face and his heart to us. As the Book of Exodus recounts, on revealing himself to Moses he defined himself in this way: '*the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness*' (Exodus 34:6). . . .

The Lord is 'merciful': this word evokes a tender approach like that of a mother toward her child. . . . The image it suggests is that of a God who is moved and who softens for us like a mother when she takes her child in her arms, wanting only to love, protect, help, ready to give everything, even herself. . . . It is also said of this merciful God that he is '*slow to anger.*' . . . God knows how to wait, his time is not the impatient one of humanity; he is like the wise farmer who knows how to wait, allowing time for the good seed to grow, in spite of the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30).

Lastly, the Lord proclaims himself '*abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*' How beautiful this definition of God is! . . . The word 'love,' used here, indicates *affection, grace, goodness*. It is not soap opera love. It is love which takes the first step, which does not depend on human merit but on immense gratuitousness. It is divine solicitude that . . . is able to go beyond sin, to overcome evil and forgive it.

Abounding in '*faithfulness*': this is the final word of God's revelation to Moses. . . . Faithfulness in mercy is the very being of God. For this reason God is totally and always trustworthy. . . . This is the assurance of our faith. Thus, in this Jubilee of Mercy, let us entrust ourselves to him totally, and experience the joy of being loved by this 'God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness.'

As we approach the end of the Church's Liturgical Year, and refocus our thoughts on the year that is to come, may we continue to find God alive and living in our community of faith.

**CFO of the Diocese of Saginaw:**

A few weeks ago, the Chief Financial Officer of the diocese was here to talk to the Parish Pastoral and Finance Council about perpetual care of our three cemeteries. A few days later we exchanged emails and I wanted to share with you her email to me regarding the outstanding job we are doing in building an active faith community despite our varied backgrounds. This is what she said:

**"It was so delightful to see how far this parish has come. There was a positive, forwarding thinking energy in the room greater than I have experienced during my past visits. Thank you!"**

We still have work to do, but we are well on our way, and we are in this together.

**Alpha Faith Sharing Groups & Outreach:**

Last week I mentioned an adult program I'd like to start in Advent (the season of new beginnings for the Church), and last week's bulletin talked all about the Alpha program spreading both in America and Europe. You can find that article talking about Alpha on our website under the "What's New" tab, or there are extra copies of the article in the back of church if you've missed it.

Alpha is a tool for outreach that is being used by thousands of Catholic parishes in over 70 countries around the world. Alpha is also run by churches of many other denominations to introduce people to the life-changing message of Jesus Christ. This has led to more than 24 million people around the world experiencing Alpha. In particular, it is attracting many young people who are asking the question, 'Is there more to life than this?'

I wanted to share with you an insight from a priest in Canada, who has been using Alpha for years now, and has seen his parish double in size:

"I have been running Alpha in all my parishes since 2001, and I am even more convinced than ever that it is the most effective tool I have found to date. There may be another, but I have not yet found it. I have seen all my parishes

transformed by placing Alpha at the center of our evangelistic efforts, and have even expanded the use of Alpha in my present parish. At my parish, we are clear that Alpha is not just one of many programs we use, but that it is foundational to our identity as a missional and evangelizing Church. We recently concluded eight different Alphas running concurrently, with over 350 guests, about a third of whom are non-churchgoers. We host daytime Alphas, Friday night Alphas, Thursday night Alphas, Pub Alpha, Sushi Alpha (we take over an entire sushi restaurant), Youth Alpha in the parish and in the local public high school, Alpha in a community center, Alpha by the Hearth (in homes), and Alpha in a prison. All these courses are run by our parishioners, many of whom have experienced conversion and transformation through their own experience of Alpha. We have a veritable army of evangelizers successfully using this program to create a profound sense of belonging so that guests may hear and receive the Good News of Jesus Christ."

Here at St. Vincent de Paul, we will start off small, and hopefully grow from there. I need help in determining the best time to run this weekly (ten weeks) two hour program. Should we meet on a Monday evening, Thursday evening, or on a Sunday morning after Mass? Your input is very much needed. Please let me know your thoughts!

### **Halloween:**

There's no reason to be afraid of the ghouls and goblins roaming the neighborhood on All Hallows' Eve. They're just participating in an ancient—and Catholic—holiday.

Halloween is steeped in Catholic theology and piety, and we couldn't have arranged a more perfect synthesis of devotion and festivity had we tried. When you get to the core of what the holiday is, you find an overwhelmingly Catholic Christian holiday. It should be recognized and celebrated as such—warts, spider webs, and all.

Symbolically and historically, Halloween is associated with the supernatural, death, and spooky things, but its evolution from its ancient origins to its current permutation is interesting to note.

In the Christian calendar November 1 is All Saints Day, or "All Hallows' Day." The word "Halloween" is simply the abbreviated form of "All Hallows' Eve," the vigil celebration in anticipation of the feast day.

In the early fourth century, All Saints Day was a way to commemorate the martyrs, but later all of the saints were included in the festival. All Souls Day is our day to remember those who have fallen asleep in Christ who weren't officially recognized as saints.

St. Augustine reminds us, "If we had no care for the dead, we would not be in the habit of praying for them." We are all weak creatures, and none of us are holy enough to stand before the throne of God. Thus we need the prayers of others. All Saints Day and All Souls Day are meant to remind us of the need to be humble before God and each other.

The practice of dressing in costumes for All Souls Day originated in France during the 14th and 15th centuries. During the Black Death epidemics, artists would depict the *Danse Macabre*, "Dance of Death," on cemetery walls and coffins. The images would depict the devil or the personification of Death leading the recently deceased into a tomb. A custom arose in France of reenacting *Dance of Death* on All Souls Day. It was believed that the demons out that night would be fooled by the masked party-goers and move on in search for a place devoid of their diabolic behavior.

Now that we're on the same page about where Halloween historically speaking came from, the question still remains: Should we be dressing as ghouls and witches? I've never been a big fan of gore, but a pair of plastic vampire teeth and some fake blood is hardly going to traumatize anyone's child.

Halloween is a great time to get your scare on. If not now, when? Let's indulge in the sticky, the creepy, and in things that go bump in the night on Halloween. This is our night to bump back. You can dress as a devil as long as you don't succumb to the diabolical. If you dress as a demon, you are no more worshipping a demon than you are worshipping an angel if you dressed as your favorite cherub.

I will admit that some costumes are scandalous and show poor taste. Just because it's a fun holiday doesn't mean we should toss aside common sense, decency, and our ethics, or to dress in bad taste and offend anybody.

**I will be passing out candy on the front porch of the rectory, so if you're in the neighborhood, stop by for some candy.**