

From the PA's Desk

Welcome Bishop Cistone:

This Sunday we welcome Bishop Cistone who celebrated Mass for us. I thought this would be a good opportunity to give you a little catechesis on the ministry of the Bishop in his Diocese. There are only three ordained offices of ministry within the Catholic Church, and every other form of ministry flows from our baptismal calling, including those ordained. A bishop is considered to have the "fullness of the priesthood," and a Diocesan Bishop in his Diocese is both the Chief Shepherd and Vicar of Christ (head of the body of Christ) for his local Diocesan Church. Even those who are archbishops, cardinals, and even the Pope himself, are first and foremost bishops of a diocese, with the pope having a unique role of overseeing unity among the other bishops. The Pope is referred to by his other brother bishops as "The First Among Equals," and the Pope, who is the Bishop of Rome, has Rome as his diocese.

The past few weeks we have been hearing a lot about Peter's role in the early Church, and it was Peter to whom Jesus entrusted the task of keeping the Church together. Throughout the centuries this ministry reaches us through the bishop of Rome, the successor of Peter, and through the other diocesan bishops who are the successors of the Apostles.

A few months ago the Church celebrated the Feast of the "Chair of Peter," and that image is related to the bishop's chair in the diocesan cathedral, called the *Cathedra*. If one visits our cathedral in Saginaw, one notices a special Chair called a *Cathedra*, which is the seat of the bishop of the diocese. The only person who may sit in that chair is the bishop of that diocese. This cathedra is the symbol of the bishop's authority, especially his pastoral, governing, sanctifying, and teaching authority. We're familiar with this term already, especially in the academic world, where an honored professor may hold a "chair" in some particular field of expertise. The "chair" says something about the importance of the subject matter, not only to students, but also to the wider community.

The *cathedra* of the bishop is important for the Catholic community as well, because the Chair of its Bishop is the place from which he leads and guides the community, and speaks not only to the Catholic community but to the larger community as well. This is why a diocesan bishop in his diocese is both the One Shepherd for every parish in his diocese, and the Vicar of Christ for the faithful entrusted to him. Since the bishop cannot be at all his parishes at once, he entrusts the day to day running of the parish to his pastors or pastoral administrators.

There are 446 active and retired Catholic bishops in the United States although not all of them lead a diocese, and there are approximately just over 5000 bishops in the Latin and Eastern churches of the Catholic Church.

Scripture Today:

Last week in the Gospel we heard Jesus talk about the good shepherd being the gate keeper for his sheep. You see, at the time of Jesus, shepherds built circular pens of stone and herded their sheep into them for the night. These pens were necessary to protect the sheep from the wolves that wanted to devour them. There was a small portal which the shepherd used to bring the sheep in and out of the pen. At night, the shepherd slept at the portal's entrance – his body stretched across the opening. If a wolf tried to enter the sheep pen, it would be over the shepherd's body. When Jesus identified himself as the shepherd of our souls, he was no doubt thinking of what it

means to be a good shepherd, and what would happen to his own body which he would give up for the sake of the souls his Father in heaven put under his protection.

Being a good shepherd was not an image Jesus applied only to himself. Later in John's Gospel, Jesus lays it as a charge on Peter, when he says: "Feed my sheep" (21:15-17).

Often, we in the church are referred to as sheep. The use of this imagery tells us much about our relationship with Jesus. Sheep are very timid animals and easily get lost, but they do know the voice of their shepherd. We, like sheep, aren't always sure of ourselves or our direction in life. Despite all that God gives us, we don't always devote ourselves completely to following our shepherd; we wander off at times to follow the voices of strangers. Jesus, knowing our limitations, is a good shepherd always there for us, waiting for our return. When Jesus tells us that He is the gate, it helps us to understand the lengths to which He will go to protect us. Just as shepherds were known to lie down and physically become the gate for their sheep, Jesus is saying that He will do the same. The proof of this is seen every time we look at a crucifix. Jesus is the gate for our entry to eternal life, but He also appoints shepherds—bishops—to help lead us along that journey. The shepherding role of a bishop is symbolized visually by his use of a staff called a crosier.

We, too, are called to be good shepherds, caring for those around us with the love of Christ. As you go through your day today, give some thought to who cares for your soul. Who in your life wants to care for and protect your soul? Priests and religious aren't the only ones. Members of your parish staff are working for the care and feeding of your soul as well. Pray for those who love and care for you. They, too, are good shepherds for you.

Alpha this week: Why and How Should I Tell Others?

Talk summary:

- "The Church exists in order to evangelize" (Pope Paul VI)

2017 Graduates:

All of those in the Parish who are graduating from high school or college this year are invited to join for a special Baccalaureate Mass in June. Please call the office or talk to Mary Moomey and let us know who you are, so we can send you a special invitation and recognize you in our parish bulletin.

CSA:

May is here, and it's time for the annual Catholic Services Appeal (C.S.A.). Next weekend we will begin our campaign and you should have received a letter from the diocese by now. Funds collected from the C.S.A. provide many valuable ministries and programs. Who benefits from the C.S.A.? Let me share just a few examples: The C.S.A. subsidizes the education of future priests, deacons, and lay ministers for the Church through Seminaries and the Center for Ministry. The C.S.A. helps the needy and provides outreach and evangelization. The C.S.A. aids Catholic education, R.C.I.A., and youth ministries. The C.S.A. funds diocesan offices that serve as a resource for the parishes. If you or a loved one have ever received a marriage annulment, the costs were covered by the C.S.A. The Catholic Services Appeal does so much, and the diocese provides ministries and programs that are beyond the means of parishes. Each parish has been assigned an annual target amount. Our 2017 St. Vincent de Paul Parish CSA goal is \$45,162. Every dollar that we raise above the target returns to our parish and we can use them to develop our future evangelization, whole community catechesis and youth ministry programs. Please be generous to the Catholic Services Appeal this year. Your annual pledge or gift is a blessing to the diocese, its parishes, and its people!