

From the Deacon's Desk

Deacon Ordination:

Thank you to the parishioners who joined me on Sunday for my deacon ordination. It was an amazing and moving liturgy in which I felt the Holy Spirit or God stirring in my soul, as hundreds of people prayed over us. I could also feel the prayers from the parishioners of St. Vincent de Paul and St. John XXIII who were not there in person, but I knew were still with me in spirit.

Scripture Today:

Years ago I found a reflection that helps me understand what Jesus' was doing at the last supper when he gave us his Body and Blood to ingest. I use the reflection often whenever I talk to people about the Eucharist, and I'd like to share it with you. It is from John Shea.

"He took bread and gave you thanks. He took his whole life into his hands, a life that he saw as food for others. This is not one action in a life of many actions. This is the premier action. Once his whole life is in his hands, he gives thanks. Gratitude defines his deepest sense of himself. His life is not his own. The life of God is flowing through him at every moment. Gratitude wells up in him. And it is out of this fullness that he gives.

Day by day during his whole life, Jesus, the word who became God's own flesh, tried to embody, to make visible God's love for the world. He had done this not only by sharing his own experience of God's love, but also by curing the sick, fighting injustice, defending the poor, and opposing the religious leaders who oppressed the people under the burden of the Law.

When Jesus took the bread and wine in his hands, it was his whole life he was holding, a life of love offered day by day. At the Last Supper, he summed up the meaning and purpose of his life and his death. He broke the bread, gave it to his friends, and said, "Take this all of you, and eat it: this is my body, which will be given for you" In other words, "this is my life given for you." Naturally, the fullness of Jesus needs to be broken to be received.

Jesus' desire is that we take this broken life and make it our own. He wants to pour his life into our life so that our life can grow strong. He is food. We must be open to receive this life. Then we must realize we are this life. We receive it in order to join in its self-giving. Who was it who said, "When we eat physical food, it becomes us. When we eat spiritual food, we become it."

When Jesus finally said: "Do this in memory of me," he did not mean only: "Do this ritual in memory of me." He meant much more; he meant: "Do as I did. Give of your life day by day and even unto death. For this is where you will find the courage you will need to walk in my footsteps, to give your life as I did, day by day."

Shea's beautiful reflection had me think of the numerous ways you and I give our lives away every day, so that others might be more blessed for their own journey. Good parents do that for their children. In all kinds of ways, they sacrifice their lives for their children. They die (metaphorically) by their actions so that their children may live. Good teachers do that for their students, good mentors do that for their protégés, good pastors do that for their parishioners, good politicians do that for their countries, and all good elders do that for the young. They give away some of their own lives to resource the young.

St. Augustine (who has few rivals when it comes to understanding the Eucharist) once said: "When we come to the Eucharistic Prayer, we should all go stand on the altar." What Augustine was saying is that all of us offer our lives up on that altar with Jesus. We give God all our joys, challenges, struggles, and failings, and we take the Body of Christ into us as a spiritual food that will make us stronger for the journey ahead. St Augustine also said in regard to the Eucharist: "When the priest (minister) hands you the Eucharist and says: 'The Body of Christ, receive what you are and become what you receive.'"

Once we have taken the presence of Christ into us, we leave church to become that presence for someone else. Like Jesus on the altar, we continue to give our lives away for others.

CSA 2017:

Our annual Catholic Services Appeal (CSA) campaign has begun. Our quota is about \$45,000. As of Thursday, we have collected about \$26,000 in pledges, or about 56% of our goal. I know we can make our quota as we have for the past several years. If you don't have a pledge card for CSA, there are some at the doors of the church. CSA serves the bigger world church and our local diocese. It is worth your support.

I hope you will consider a gift of 1% of your annual income, and any money that comes back to the parish will be used for future evangelization, youth ministry, and whole community catechesis programs.

Thoughts from Alpha Participants:

In the back of church is a tri-fold poster with brief word descriptions from those who experienced Alpha this year. Please take a look to see the feelings and emotions expressed by our participants this year. Alpha is intended to continue every year (as long as we can find the money needed for the meals), with more and more non-parishioners invited to experience it for themselves. Thank you to Diane Courter who had this idea and put the display together!

What's after Alpha?

Alpha has come to an end for the year, and I was impressed with how many of our approximately 100 participants said last Monday that they were sad it was ending. My intention is to continue Alpha next year for any Catholics who have not experienced it, or any non-parishioners or non-believers you know of who would like a basic introduction to Christianity.

The next step is to create some form of an Evangelization 201 program, which would be an attempt to contact those who were once parishioners here, but for whatever reasons, we don't see around anymore. In the past year I've been told by many people that their family members who are Catholic live in this area but they don't attend Mass anymore. We need to start contacting them to find out why, and to invite them back. Before we can invite non-Catholics to join us, why don't we start with those Catholics who have stopped coming to church, for whatever reasons? If you'd like to be a part of this next phase of outreach to alienated and inactive Catholics, please, please, see me.

Months ago I met with Fr. Bert Gohm who developed an evangelization and outreach program to Catholics in one of his former parishes, and we need to develop that approach here. Hopefully we can get teams of parishioners to make a list of those who used to attend, and either contact them by phone, in person, or maybe at their homes, and ask them to return. At the very least, we can ask what they need from us.

In addition to our ongoing evangelization efforts, next year we will start Whole Community Catechesis once a month. Whole Community Catechesis is an opportunity to bring forth everyone in the parish of all ages (young and older) after Sunday Mass for fellowship around a breakfast together, followed by an hour of catechesis at each person's age appropriate level. As we have witnessed from our Alpha program this year, sit down meals are a big part of "getting people here," so we naturally will begin Whole Community Catechesis with a meal together.

I would like to also run an eight week program called *Mass Matters: We Are Called To Glory* which helps us better understand the mystery of the Eucharist and how it will change our lives. There is absolutely nothing on earth like a Eucharistic Liturgy, which is the highest form of prayer and thanksgiving to God, and it also makes present the one death and resurrection of Jesus Christ right here and right now. What we do in the Mass is not a cognitive remembering of Jesus' sacrifice from 2000 years ago, but we are united to the very same event from 2000 years ago, and we are also connected to the celebration in heaven simultaneously. How many of us who didn't study at a seminary or theology school really realize this? Mass Matters can help us understand the power, mystery, and beauty of the Mass than ever before.

Through the Eucharist we become stamped with the pattern of Christ's own self-giving love so that we can reproduce that pattern in our own lives. Thus the goal of the liturgy is never just to receive the sacrament and go home; it is to become a living tabernacle through which Christ is made present to others. This is why the liturgy ends with words: "Go, you are sent." At every Mass the Church—that is, all her members—are newly empowered and sent forth to bring Christ into the world.