



# **St. Charles Borromeo Church**

*A Catholic Community  
in the heart of Brooklyn Heights*

## **2020**

# **Selected Homilies**

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The homilies in this compilation were taken from transcripts of our Masses this liturgical year and document the life of the parish during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The recordings of the Masses are available on our website at <https://stcharlesbklyn.org> and also on our YouTube channel, <https://youtube.com/stcharlesbklyn> .

“St. Charles at Home” is a YouTube series where parishioners discuss the Gospel with that week’s homilist. The first season is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL60TKkGo-DhSaXgHYZbUCOerOdWWIxYP>.

### 3rd Sunday of Advent – Msgr. LoPinto

December 16, 2019

*The Family Faith Formation program children traditionally hold their Christmas Pageant during the 11:15 am Mass on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent and again on Christmas Eve.*

Each year, the children present us with this very beautiful reenactment of the Christmas story, and they do that with great enthusiasm and excitement. Witness the dedication to detail – the preciseness of their costumes, as well as the way they make the whole scene flow. So they remind us that this is a very special time of the year.

But I think, unfortunately, in the midst of the world in which we live, much gets lost of the symbolism, the meaning and significance of this special time. So when the children present the

beautiful scene, I ask you to take a moment to reflect, to reflect on the scene, for Luke and Matthew – that's where the gospel today came from: a combination of Luke and Matthew who record for us the infancy story – they did that with great deliberation and they wanted in a sense in the scene that they were portraying capture the universality of this event, for it was an event that brought together the mystery of God's creation.

Mary and Joseph come to Bethlehem because Caesar Augustus has decided he wants to count all the people. He wants you in a sense to build his power, build his power, by saying, look all the people I rule over. How can anyone doubt me, how can anyone challenge me?

And yet, in the midst of that moment, God chose to reveal, really the story of creation in that little scene in Bethlehem, the story of creation

unfolds. For Joseph and Mary come and they find no place. The town is overwhelmed with people who have come for the census, and so they go to the cave, some say a barn, but some place in the midst of where the animals are. And it is significant that they go to the place where the animals are. Creation is a story of Harmony, the story of unity.

And so, in the midst of that scene, a child is born. An infant in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger. The place is cold: it's winter and so it is the warmth of the animals' breath that creates that scene, that warmth, that sense that everything is okay.

And then come the shepherds with the sheep. They were on the outskirts – if you ever go to Bethlehem, you will see that from the site where the nativity is said to have taken place, where they are on the outskirts of town, a place called the



Shepherd's Field, because nobody wanted their smell or the smell of the sheep. So, they were outcasts, they were put aside, and yet it is to them that the angels first come and bring the good news, bring glad tidings. They were the first to come and offer worship. They were outsiders God invites in, brings to this very special moment.

And along with the Shepherds you have the Wise Men, who come later, but who represent in a sense the secular role, coming from different places, and again, of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, and they all come to one place, where there, they might find the gift of God, and the gift of God is embodied in the Child, in Jesus.

But that can be significant, because that child is not your children, in cribs or bassinets, or those beautiful things, but placed in the manger, the feeding trough of the animals. You have this scene

of creation unfolding. God has another message in the that I will build, I will build this Kingdom, represented in this scene. I will build it by continually feeding you: feeding you with my life.

The Child in the Manger is the sign of the Eucharist, the sign of how God continues to draw us into the mystery of God's life. That that fulfillment of creation might ultimately be a change. In a sense, there may come a day – as Isaiah so beautifully prophesizes – there may come a day on God's holy mountain when harmony, when unity, when joy and when peace will reign over the face of the Earth.

As we prepare for Christmas, that's what we're preparing for: preparing to remember, to remember that this is what God has deigned to do and invited us as the children participated in this beautiful scene,

inviting all of us to participate – day in and day out – to make this scene live.

Brothers and sisters, that is the ultimate challenge of Christmas. We thank the children for participating in presenting this great remembrance. We pray that it inspires all of us in these days that are coming, as we prepare for the great day of Christmas, that we take time, as we put that nativity scene together in our homes, we take time to take each of those pieces, to remember what they represent, and make them, make them a part of our living going forward.

We invite the children now to go back to their places. Because Life goes on.

## 4th Sunday of Advent – Fr. Gribowich

December 23, 2019

*Fr. John Gribowich was concluding his studies at U.C. Berkeley, as well as assisting at St. Joseph the Worker Church in Berkeley, California.*

Good morning, everyone!

Happy 4th Sunday of Advent! I was here with you for the first Sunday of Advent, and now I'm here with the last Sunday of Advent. Maybe one of these years I'll be here at Christmas, too, but that's not going to happen this year, either, because I leave to go back to New York tomorrow. And I actually, unfortunately, this will come to the end of my time here at Saint Joseph's, because my program at Berkeley wrapped up this semester, so I will not just be leaving and then coming back. I will be leaving

pretty much for good, although I do hope to come back and visit in April, so I ask for your prayers.

And it's very providential that the last time I will be able to spend with you, we hear this Gospel that speaks of how the birth of Jesus comes about through the lens, if you will, of St. Joseph. Since it's very providential to be here at the church of St. Joseph and to preach about our patron saint, and of course during Christmastime there are not that many Christmas readings. In fact, the infancy narratives only happen in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. So we hear them often, and of course, we hear them so often, that we tend to kind of gloss over some of the details. But every single word in the scripture can ultimately be looked upon as being purposeful in some type of way, and if we look at how Joseph is described in this Gospel, I think it gives us some insight as to how we as Christians are called to live our lives.

Firstly, Joseph is known as a righteous man. He was a righteous man and therefore he knew what was right, and the fact that he learned that his soon-to-be wife was pregnant and he knew that he wasn't the father, he knew that to be right would be to somehow get out of this arrangement, to get out of this future marriage. He was righteous.

Sometimes we also hear that he was just – a just man, and we also hear once the angel Gabriel appears to Joseph, that he's given a title, if you will: Joseph, son of David. Son of David.

So he's a righteous man, and he's a son of David, and why are those words so important in understanding who Joseph is? Because to be a righteous man – to be a righteous woman – to be a just man or just woman isn't simply just about knowing what's right and wrong. It's more fundamentally important understanding who you

are in relationship to God, who you are in relationship to God.

Joseph was righteous because he knew who God is, and he also knew who he was. He knew that he wasn't God. He understood his relationship to God. He understood that he did not play God. He was not in charge of his destiny, if you will. He did not will himself into existence. He wasn't responsible for his birth. Joseph is a righteous and just man because he understands who he is in relationship to God, and he stands in all of that relationship.

And in a very similar sense, as he's called the son of David he understands that he participates in something much bigger than himself: a lineage that goes back to King David, and who he is actually as a human being is not singularly important. What is important is the fact that he comes from a royal

house. Once again, something that he did not choose, knew, or something that he deserved.

And when we think about that we can understand why Joseph was the exact right fit for what was to be the Holy Family. Think about what he had working against him: working with the sinless mother of God, and the son of God. If there was anything that went wrong in the house, it was Joseph's fault. Only a man who was righteous and just and understood who he was in relationship to God and understood him playing a role in something bigger than himself could be able to humbly be able to be part of that family.

And the key takeaway here is that Joseph was willing to become nothing. He was willing to become nothing, and that actually is what each one of us are called to become: nothing. To enter into a state of nothingness. Even the great spiritual writer



St. John of the Cross will talk about nada, nada, nada: nothing, nothing, nothing. To enter into a state of nothingness. It's so nothing that there's absolutely no recorded words of Joseph anywhere in scripture. We hear about his dreams, we hear about what he does, but he never actually speaks. He's so nothing, even within the Gospels.

But the question is why are we called to become nothing? Sounds to be kind of a downer, and especially in our world where we seek very hard to find meaning as to why we're here, and we work very hard at making sure that we're making an impact within our families, our friends, our society, our world. However you want to look at it, all of us are striving. To understand what our vocation is. All of us are striving to be good people.

I come from the world of U.C. Berkeley, where everyone is trying to change the world in some place,

shape or form, yet nothing is what we're ultimately called to. How does that square with this innate desire to want to be someone of importance? And it boils down to this: nothingness reveals to each and every one of us that God can and will use us to bring about something that we could never ever accomplish on our own. That's why we're called to be nothing, because if we have great dreams and great ideas, let's look at this dream: Joseph you thought you were going to be able to be the husband of this young woman and to be able to walk with her on the journey of life together, if that was your dream: look at this dream. Your nothingness will bring something far greater than you could ever, ever imagine. You will have a role upbringing healing to the world through Jesus Christ, the son of God.

Our call to nothingness shows that each and every single person is a means of bringing about

God's presence his glory, his healing into a broken world. It's not just for a few people it's not just for priests and religious. it's not just for the pope or other very influential people in the world who have special unique callings, because they're very public about them. Every single person is a means of God's healing in the world.

But the only way that we can be able to do that is to accept the fact that we can't do it. That there's nothing that we can do on our own power that can bring about changes in the world. We can't even change ourselves on our own. It's the great fallacy of our self-help culture that you can somehow fix yourself: you can't. Sure, all those things can give you the techniques and means, but ultimately until you're able to say I give up, you will not be able to do what God wants for you to do. That is the great lesson of Joseph. That is why we call him saint. That is why he was honored to be part of the Holy Family.

He knew who he was and he knew who he was not, and he accepted who he was not as a means of bringing his God – our God – into the world.

That same God – Jesus – once again comes to us at this Mass, and while Joseph was the one to behold and care for the baby Jesus, we are actually given the honor of becoming one with that baby: communion with that baby. The same Jesus born 2000 years ago comes into us as a sure sign that we are not alone, as a sure sign that it's not about us mustering up the strength to be good people, as a sure sign that we're given everything we need to become the Sons and Daughters of God, when we receive the Son of God and share in his sonship. That is what communion is: it is a way for us to once again claim our true identity. It is once the way yet again a way for us to be just and to be righteous and knowing who we are their relationship to God.

So as the next couple days ago – and we’re going to be hit with lots of challenges right? – for all the joy of the Christmas season we know that it brings a lot of challenges. It’s seeing people that we don’t normally see. It’s dealing with family friction, it’s dealing with lots of things that could go wrong around the house. We all know we have lots of stuff on our minds, but the great thing is though none of us can possibly think we can fix or make everything perfect around Christmastime, when we realize that it’s all about the one who we celebrate – Jesus – who is given permission by each one of us to bring about the healing that’s much needed in our world and maybe more locally with our in-laws.

So may God bless you. I will take you to prayer with me as I leave from here. I guess just as a practical side, I’m going to be for three months in a monastery praying and discerning what the next step is the Lord has for me, so I’m on this track of

getting this degree here and working in Catholic media, but maybe the Lord might have a different plan, because his dreams are far greater than any dream I can come up with.

Amen?

*[Congregation: “Amen!”]*

May God bless each one of you.

## **1st Sunday of Lent – Fr. Smith**

March 1, 2020

*New York City would go under lockdown for COVID-19 on March 13.*

Moses is the hidden presence behind Matthew's Gospel. His name may not be often spoken but there are passages in the Gospel which can only be fully understood by a reference to him. During the Christmas season, we read about the slaughter of the Innocents. (Mt 2:13-18) Understanding that and indeed the entire story of the flight into Egypt clearly depends upon knowing the details of the birth of Moses. Less obvious, but just as important, are the references to Moses in the visit of the Magi. (Mt 2:1-12) As we read the Gospel of Matthew throughout the year, we will find the presence of Moses hidden in plain sight.

Nowhere is this more important than in today's reading of the testing of Jesus.

Let us look at the background. In the section before today's, Jesus has emerged from the baptismal waters of the Jordan just as the Israelites had gone through the waters of the Red Sea and both find themselves in the desert. Jesus spends 40 days in the desert; the Israelites 40 years, but it is a time of testing for both. Matthew tells us that Jesus was led by the Spirit and the book of Exodus (Ex 13:31) relates that the Jews were led by the "pillar of cloud and fire". The great difference is that the Israelites were in the desert because of their sins. Although they had been the beneficiary of deliverance by God from the Egyptians, they rebelled – even fashioning a golden calf for worship. Therefore, they would not receive the promised reward of possession of the land that flowed with milk and honey until they made penance for their



sins. They were given a mission from the LORD and for them to be His people, they would need to embrace it. The route from Egypt to Canaan would have taken no more than a few months to complete if distance were the only issue, but it would take 40 years because of their attitude.

The book of Deuteronomy tells them clearly that “the LORD has directed all your journeying in the desert, so as to test you by affliction and find out whether or not it was your intention to keep his commandments” (Dt 8:2).

There were three basic tests. The first was hunger: The Israelites said to them, “Would that we had died at the LORD’S hand in the land of Egypt, as we sat by our fleshpots and ate our fill of bread! But you had to lead us into this desert to make the whole community die of famine!” (Ex 16:3) He fed them but remembered and had to wander longer.

The second was putting the Lord to the east:

*3 Here, then, in their thirst for water, the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “Why did you ever make us leave Egypt? Was it just to have us die here of thirst with our children and our livestock?” (Ex 17:3).*

The Lord gave them the water but never marked the event and extended their sojourn: *7 The place was called Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled there and tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD in our midst or not?” (Ex 17:7).*

The third was idolatry. When the people became aware of Moses’ delay in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who will be our leader; as for the man Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him.<sup>6</sup> Early the next day the people offered holocausts and

*brought peace offerings. Then they sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel (Ex 32:1& 6).*

With this they condemned themselves to such a long penance that Joshua and Caleb were the only members of the Exodus generation who entered the promised land. The others had failed to accept the mission the Lord had for them. As with Adam and Eve, the LORD did not abandon them but through kings, prophets, sages and martyrs He would reveal His love more fully. The people would follow for a while and then would fail again but then He sent His Son to spend His time in the desert.

He too is hungry, but rather than breaking his fast continues his mission and replies to the devil from the book of Deuteronomy that he would be fed not by bread but by God's word. (8:3)

He too is weakened by the difficulty of the journey, but as the Son of God he is secure in his

Father's love and does not need to be reassured. Although the devil now quotes scripture, Jesus himself responds with another line from the book of Deuteronomy: that it is the Lord who tests, not any creature. (6:16)

Finally, Jesus, like the Israelites, knows that his mission is dangerous. He must face the forces of evil and even if there is victory there will be much suffering. When the devil, the very personification of evil, promises to surrender in advance if Jesus worshiped him – is not this a swift and sure end to the eternal conflict? Jesus not only sees through the trap but reacts violently. and gives his final quote from Deuteronomy, that only the LORD should be worshiped (6:13)

It is not a coincidence that Jesus quotes from the book of Deuteronomy. It was thought to have been written by Moses and provided the clearest

expression of his beliefs. Matthew is connecting Moses and Jesus as tightly as possible. This is not to even imply that Jesus is the second Moses, Jesus is utterly unique, but that Jesus is offering a new way to union with the LORD.

This is important to Matthew and his community and should be for us as well. They risked a great deal becoming Christians. Yet they may be tempted to dilute their discipleship by the search for money, or putting God to the test to see what he can do for them or even to worship some other way of life which may mention Jesus but will not be subject to him. We are being told today that Jesus himself has been tested in these ways, but unlike Israel has succeeded.

This is the key lesson here. It may be a good spiritual exercise to ask ourselves how we would have done with these tests, and an even better one

to ask how our community would have fared. But we should never take our eyes off Jesus. Beyond all else, we must recognize that Jesus did not fail and that if we build our lives and our church Parish upon Him today, we will be able to stand with Him forever.

## 4th Sunday Lent – Fr. Gribowich

March 23, 2020

*The Brooklyn Diocese suspended the Sunday Obligation and closed all of the churches to the public. This is the first Mass held by the parish via Zoom, broadcast from the Rectory Chapel.*

Good morning, once again. I know this is so unusual for many of us to have to be experiencing that this way, so thank you for being patient with us and we're learning as we go here, as well.

And of course I haven't seen you in a long time – and I still don't see you now – so I can kind of empathize with the blind man that we hear in our gospel today. So to be back in Brooklyn, to be able to be part of the St. Charles community is always a very great blessing for me, and to not actually have

you in the same physical spaces, of course a very trying thing for me, and I'm sure it is for you, too.

So we are together, united through what may take place here at this Mass through the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ comes to us in three ways: of course, we experience the Body of Christ by meditating upon the body that was nailed to the cross and rose from the dead.

The Body of Christ, of course, comes to us through the Eucharist. And of course, the Body of Christ is us as a Church. All of us participate in the Body of Christ, so we're never far from the presence of Christ, because the very fact is that we share in the inner workings of His body.

One of the great themes that we see throughout all of Scripture is the great image of the relationship and contrasts between light and



darkness. And even in the second reading today St. Paul talks about how we are people of the Light.

And of course, there is baptism. We believe that we're given a certain type of supernatural grace to be able to participate in seeing the fullness of God in different ways. And we often look at lightness being something that's very good and very positive: the presence of God. Darkness of course being the very opposite – something that is evil, something that is the absence of God, something that is what turns us away from thinking that God is even present at all.

Yet when we think about this gospel that we just heard, it's not so simple. It's not black and white, if you will, and it comes across in the very final thing that Jesus says to the Pharisees. Because the Pharisees are kind of questioning this whole episode of why Jesus heals on the Sabbath.

And Jesus says I've come into the world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see and those who see might become blind. Listen to that very closely: Jesus comes not for us to see, in other words, not for us to see the light, but he also comes that for those of us who actually somehow are perceived in the light can actually become blind.

What's he getting at? Why does Jesus want us to become blind to enter into darkness? Well I think it's very relevant to what we're experiencing right now, because many of us here are trying to make sense of this by using our natural vision, if you will, trying to look at things in our own lights. All of us right now are searching for answers from our leaders, from our scientists, from those in the medical profession. All of us are trying to figure out how to make this whole thing go away or how to just solve it in the quickest way possible, so we can just go back to our normal lives.

But perhaps what Jesus is calling us to do right now is to allow ourselves to enter into darkness – to become blind, and to become blind not so that we can think that somehow God is not with us – because our own natural light can question that – but to become blind so that we can actually be given the light of Christ, to see through His eyes.

It's very interesting how Jesus heals this man who's born blind. He takes the earth and he uses his saliva and then rubs it over his eyes. If we think about the very beginning of the Bible, one when humans are created, they're created from the earth. Jesus in a certain sense wants us to return back to our humanity, because it's in our pure human form that we are actually who God wants us to be.

Jesus uses that clay and gives the man sight so he sees in the way that Christ allows him to see – not in the way that our distorted way from thinking

about things, but in the way that Jesus wants to see. I think what's the most important part about this story, as well, is that this man did not return back to seeing before because he never saw before. He was born blind and at this moment in time the world has been changed, and it's not going to go back to what it was before.

We have to be able at this moment to say yes to being blind, so that Jesus can give us this new sight to see how He's working in the midst of this. Jesus has not abandoned us, ever. The very fact that we're breathing proves that God still has a mission and a purpose for us to be here right now. How do we respond to this – did we use our natural vision to try to figure out what we're supposed to do at this time, or do we allow ourselves to be in the dark so that we can actually give our full trust and confidence in the vision of Christ to transform our own natural vision. That's ultimately what we're

called to do. But all that matters – but all that requires for us to do is to actually allow ourselves to become blind.

I was thinking about this in light of different men and women throughout the ages who have been denied access to the sacraments. In a certain sense, they were in the dark because they didn't have access to church, they didn't have access to receiving the Eucharist, or receiving sacraments.

And one of the people I've been thinking about the last couple days as someone who actually from my own home state of Pennsylvania. He came from a very small coal mining town of Shenandoah. He was a Jesuit priest, Walter Ciszek, and he unfortunately when he was being trained to to go and serve the Russian people went into a very tragic situation where he was put in prison by the Soviets. He was in the gulag for about 20 years and during

that time there wasn't much that time in solitary confinement where he himself as a priest could not celebrate Mass – no access to the sacraments – and I was taken by the fact that he was able to reflect upon his time after his released in the 1960s.

Now what was happening during that time in his life – and of course in that time in the world and he writes some very profound things – I just wanted to share this with you – this is what he writes in a book that he wrote called *He Leadeth Me*, and I think that his words apply directly to what we're going through right now so I'd ask you just listen closely to these words of a man who most likely will be a saint in our lifetime.

Father Cizek writes, "Mysteriously, God in His providence must make use of our tragedies to remind our fallen human nature of His presence and His love, of the constancy of His concern and

care for us. It is not vindictiveness on His part; He does not send us tragedies to punish us for having so long forgotten Him. The failing is on our part.

“He was always present and ever faithful. It is we who failed to see Him or to look for Him in times of ease and comfort, to remember He is there shepherding and gardening and providing us the very things we come to count on and expect to sustain us every day.

“One thing only need be of great concern to us in all this seeming upheaval and catastrophe: to be faithful to God and to look to Him in everything, confident of His love and His constancy. Aware that this world and this new order is not our lasting city, any more than the previous one had been, and striving always to know His will and to do it each day of our lives.”

May we deny our own sight this day, our own vision. Allow ourselves to become blind and ask Jesus to give us new sight and a new vision to see his powerful work, working in the midst of a very, very trying time.

God bless you.



### 3rd Sunday of Easter – Fr. Gribowich

April 26, 2020

Good afternoon, everyone – I think it's past, no it's not past noon yet, right? That's good morning everyone, and it's great to be, of course, here with you again. Hopefully you can hear us all right. I know that this still gets a little complicated when we're trying to balance moving so many different moving parts here, with the video and everything. But it's great to be here with you, even though it's virtual.

So today, we hear the great story of the discovery of Jesus on the way to Emmaus, and the story makes me think of a lot of things, but I think perhaps it particularly makes me think about coming from Pennsylvania, actually from Allentown. There's a town close by called Emmaus, and of course the town is used in light of the biblical

reference, and so there's different places that are kind of named after the biblical town. So for example, there's a religious goods store and they call the store The Way to Emmaus, and then there is a store that sells running shoes and other types of things and they call it the Run-Inn, so I-N-N like the inn where Jesus stayed with these disciples, and whenever I'd like to go home to Allentown, I like to stop into Emmaus, because I do go to the Run-Inn because that's where I'll buy my running shoes and I've been doing it for years, because I was teaching at Central Catholic High School in Allentown for many, many years and working with the track team and the cross-country team, and we would always go there to buy our running shoes.

So I still go there every now and then when I'm back home, and I like going there picking out my shoes and then right when I bring them up to the counter to pay for them I'll just kind of slightly say

oh you know I used to work for Central Catholic and then BOOM, that's when the eyes open up and like oh you worked for Central, we'll give you a discount and so it's a nice little perk that we have. Well going to the Run-Inn, where you get a Central Catholic discount even though I'm not even working in there anymore.

So it kind of is similar to this whole event here that happens in the scripture where you have the eyes being opened and something different ends up happening because of that. The whole new attitude starts to emerge, and looking at this gospel, I think it's important to look at it in three ways because there's three parts, and I like to kind of look at this by pre-meal and post-meal.

So the pre-meal, of course, is when Jesus shows up and these disciples don't recognize Him and they're walking and He – they're talking and they

seem to be very downcast. Yet Jesus – although he's not understood to be Jesus – starts to explain certain things to them, and it kind of gets them somewhat intrigued – so much so that they don't want this guy to leave them. So they ask him to stay overnight. He comes into their home and they share this meal, and of course it's with the breaking of the bread that's when their eyes are open, like – oh my gosh this is Jesus! – right?

And then after that He vanishes and they had this great confidence that the stories that they heard are true – Jesus is risen from the dead – and they start announcing this, and they have no fear, it seems. And I think it's important to look at this story and let the situation we're going through right now in the world.

Because there's one thing that we as Catholics know that has been taken away, and that of course

is the participation in the meal – the Eucharist, right? And for many of us perhaps that might be the place where we see Jesus most clearly. Now when we go to church and we participate in the ritual of the mass, when we actually receive Jesus in the sacrament, this is the closest that we feel to Jesus. And it's true we are objectively close to Jesus when we receive him, because we are in communion with him in a very real way.

Yet, let's look at this in a different way today, because – wow that's the only point where the disciples recognize Jesus, and He's actually there in their presence. The whole majority of the story is dealing with this pre-meal and post-meal – in fact the only time that they actually know that they're in the presence of Jesus lasts for one verse. This is chapter 24 and verse 30, that's the only verse where they know that they're in the presence of Jesus.

So the pre-meal they don't know they're in the presence of Jesus, and the post-meal they think Jesus is gone, but they also this great confidence that He hasn't gone. I think that's the great lesson for us right now. Because we can think about where we were before the coronavirus hit and how we were living our lives prior, and we were participating in the sacraments and we had a sense that Jesus was with us. And now we're in this place where that part's been removed, and we seem to think that Jesus has vanished, but has He vanished?

I think there's something that we can pull from both the pre-meal and the post-meal, because if there's one thing that's consistent with all three of those parts of the story is that Jesus is still fully present. Yet, in the pre-meal people didn't recognize Him, and in the post-meal, people understood that He was with them in a different way.

So how can we look at that today, in this time when we feel alienated – maybe from our churches because we're not actually in them? Can we think about what it was when we were actually in church? Can we think about the world prior to this virus? What can we pull from that? Well it's more than, just say, the happy memory of going to Mass. I think our memory can just allow us to access other elements of our lives where we actually now can think about how God was present with us, even when we didn't really know that He was.

I think for many of us, we have stories where we know that, well if I didn't choose this, then this wouldn't have happened, and then this wouldn't happen. How many people who just happened to show up at some type of random events that they were invited to ended up being there – their future spouse, right, it was not planned at all.

I know for myself being a priest here in Brooklyn coming from Pennsylvania – how did that happen? Well it happened because a friend of mine in Pennsylvania went to Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, and I went to Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, and then I eventually became a priest in Brooklyn, and that's how the whole path worked. And there were a lot of other parts of that story too that I'm just kind of gliding over, but we can look at our past and have this confidence that God was there in the past. We were actually walking with Jesus without even knowing it, and its past that gives us the confidence for the now and the future. Because the same Jesus who walked with us in the past without us knowing is the same Jesus who's with us now, maybe without us actually seeing Him, just as He vanishes after the celebration of the Eucharist. There was still this confidence that the disciples had that He was actually still with them, which gave them the ability to go out and to have a full awareness and



confidence that they were able to proclaim this Good News.

But yet, what is the Good News? Because I think that would help us understand where Jesus was in our past and where Jesus is now and where Jesus will be in the future. The Good News is that whenever we are able to go outside of ourselves to act in a selfless way – in an act of charity or hospitality that we could call a God moment – that is the realization that Jesus is really with us, pushing us to go beyond ourselves, because in that experience we're able to then encounter and receive Christ. I mean it's not for nothing that the whole story starts changing once these disciples say, "Come into our house. We don't know who you are. We like what you're saying. Come into our house, stay with us." This act of hospitality where these disciples go outside of themselves was a God

moment, and it facilitated them actually being aware to know how much of a God moment was.

Fulton Sheen used to say that you know Jesus enters as a Guest but then he becomes the Host, right? Capital H-O-S-T. He becomes the Bread of Life. And so it is for us right now during this time of the virus – there are going to be many opportunities for us to be able to be pushed outside of ourselves – to pick up the phone and call someone we haven't talked to in a while, to send a random text to someone who we haven't actually been in contact for a while, to do these little random acts of kindness things that make, disrupt our schedule, but things that actually push us beyond ourselves. These little God moments – because it's in those moments we recognize that we give ourselves in order to receive the presence of Christ on the other end.

Today at this Mass that we celebrate from this place, here maybe we have the confidence in knowing that our God still is with us, even though we may not see Him. We know that He is with us. That's what gives us the ability to say, "I'm here – what do You want me to do today?"

May God bless you all.

## Good Shepherd Sunday – Fr. Smith

May 3, 2020

*At this Mass, we remembered by name those who are ill and those that have passed away during this time of COVID-19. We also honored the first responders and healthcare workers at the forefront in addressing the pandemic.*

The 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter is called Good Shepherd Sunday – the Gospel reading is always about the Good Shepherd. It has been an opportunity for priests to speak about their own vocations. My story is very boring. I wanted to be a priest since 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, went the usual route through all the stages of seminary life in due order and without any real doubt. I was ordained and have been a priest for over 40 years. I have been very happy; indeed, I think happier than I would have been doing anything else. No drama, no trauma,

and no real hook for the homily until we look at the full meaning of today's Gospel. Here, there is certainly drama, and if I hook you in, perhaps some trauma.

It begins after the story of the man born blind that we read this Lent. The leaders, shepherds, of the people did not behave well. Rather than being open to the experience of Jesus, they ejected the formerly blind man from the synagogue and sought to persecute Jesus. Jesus was not intimidated and told them *"If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, 'We see,' so your sin remains."* (Jn 9:9)

They were the truly blind because they did not see the people they were called to lead. They do not know them; Jesus uses a very homey example which would have been familiar to His listeners. Shepherds of several flocks would gather their

sheep at night and put them in an enclosure called a sheepfold. In the morning, each shepherd would call his sheep and the sheep recognizing his or her shepherds voice would follow. Sheep and shepherd knew each other, and the sheep trusted the shepherd because they had a relationship with him. Those who sought to lead but did so without knowing the sheep Jesus calls thieves and robbers. We can see the power in Pope Francis' observation that "the shepherd should smell like the sheep". He more than anyone has seen what happens when they don't.

This is a fine beginning; however important, true ministry cannot end there. The last words of today reading are "*I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly* (Jn10: 10b) This is more than the basics. Jesus continues with "*I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*" (John 10:11) Like many of Jesus's sayings,

we have heard it so much that its power and uniqueness have been lost. Leaders tend to be those who have mastered the skills of power and they lead by force. We would like to think that that does not include religion especially the church, but we know that unfortunately that is not true. His listeners immediate comment was “*He is possessed and out of his mind; why listen to him*” (John 10:20). The success of a leader who wishes to follow Jesus is not judged by managerial skills, although we want our leaders to have them; or the extent of their knowledge, although we want them to be learned, but the willingness to give and give to the point of shedding their blood.

Note here that John says “I” am the Good Shepherd; he means that only Jesus is permitted to lead. John’s immediate followers did not try to create a structure, much less a hierarchy.

Given the events of the last decade in the church this can sound rather pleasing. Yet there were problems. Who could decide if someone was speaking the truth or not? What was to be done with notorious sinners and a host of other problems? We will read the gospel of St. Matthew this summer and he will address these issues very clearly, but this discussion was not present in John.

I said immediate followers because John's Gospel and community underwent significant changes. We can see that in John 21. This was added on perhaps 50 years after what we read today and reflects that Churches like Matthew's which accepted the need for structure and the leadership of Peter and his successors were doing better than those who did not. Some in John's community knew that they had to join with Peter, but they did not want to lose their unique insight into leadership.



Jesus asks Peter 3 times if he loved him. Peter answers each time, “yes”, and Jesus tells him to feed or tend his sheep. This reflects the number of times Peter denied Jesus before the Passion. Then Jesus says to him:

Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, “Follow me.” Jn 21:18-19

If there is to be human participation in leadership in the Church, it must be based on Jesus’ example not only to smell like the sheep but the willingness to sacrifice up to death for them.

We have seen and cannot un-see that the heavy lifting in keeping church together during the pandemic has been done by lay leaders. Shall this end when we get to a new normal? Do we want to put this creativity back in a box and hope it will not have to be used again? Our religious education teachers have maintained contact with their students in ways which mystify but encourage me and we urge you to check the website and email for some of the signs of this creativity. This very Mass has been livestreamed and YouTube-ed<sup>1</sup> because of the technical expertise of our parishioners. More to the point, not only the logistics for today's special remembrance, but also the structure of the ceremony and the prayers were prepared by the

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<sup>1</sup> Viewable at <https://youtu.be/XwyNeF7fYvo> .

young professionals of St. Charles.<sup>2</sup> What else can we accomplish as a parish community?

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<sup>2</sup> Josephine Dongbang and Tevin Williams organized the Mass and presented the petitions:

For all those who are suffering at the hands of the coronavirus, and especially those in our community who are currently battling its ill effects:

1. Helima Ismael
2. John Johnson
3. Michael O Robinson
4. Sheldon Peters
5. Pauline Rubin
6. The residents of Mercy Homes, including one resident who has now passed, and its staff members

For essential workers, for all who are caring for the sick and for our healthcare heroes who are fighting the virus from the front lines with their selfless sacrifice and humble service, and especially:

1. Pei Chien
2. William Chien

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3. Elizabeth Chin
  4. Peter Fu
  5. Zachary Lerangis

For those who we now raise up to You, who have died but remain close in our hearts:

1. The deceased members of the Amorello family and their surviving members.

2. Sha-King Sycho Arrindell
3. Alphonse Baldino
4. Donna Bragg
5. Isabella Brown
6. Jim Bruno
7. Fr. Adnel Burgos
8. Vanessa Burkett
9. Angel Campos
10. Steve Candiloro
11. George Caravakis
12. Thom Carr
13. Robert Caruso
14. Sal Caruso
15. Victor Cedejas
16. Francis Cheung

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17. Susan Chuang
  18. Neville Comrie
  19. Pasquale Concessi
  20. Javier Cordero
  21. Arthur De Sola
  22. Thomas De Stephano
  23. Allen Edwards
  24. Alberto Enzler
  25. Agim Feti
  26. Al Feti
  27. John Freda
  28. Marcus Fudge
  29. Gloria Johnson
  30. Sofia Johnson
  31. James Kenney
  32. Rev. Thomas Lamb
  33. Chun-Huo Liu
  34. Indarjit Maraj
  35. Michael McCullough
  36. Lincoln Menutti
  37. John Stuart Mondello
  38. Jimmy Murphy
  39. Dan O'Neill

Next week's reading from St. Peter raises some of the relevant theological issues, and I urge you to read my comments on it in next Saturday's email. I will only note in advance that we should not become too comfortable saying that the laity will do the administrative stuff and leave the priest to the praying. The church has many forms of prayer, and no priest is equally competent in each. St. Charles would be blessed to have *Lectio Divina* or guided

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40. Fr. Jorge Ortiz-Garay

41. Mercedes Peralta

42. Jocelyn Quintero

43. Patty Rohme

44. Joan White Schmiedel

45. Stela Trifan

46. Patricia Turbee

47. Tony Whalen

48. Thomas Wong

49. The 49 residents of the Cobble Hill Health Center that have passed away and the staff that is caring for all those in the facility.

meditation in our parish, but these are not my skills. (Cheap thrill for the day: Google “Lectio Divina” and “guided meditation” and imagine me leading either).

We will however accomplish nothing of value unless those who step up to leadership seek to be good shepherds. We will need people not only with the technical skills, but also the desire to know and be known by their fellow parishioners and who will recognize that a terrible beauty may be born, but it will be a while in coming. Those of you who are most uncomfortable now may be precisely those called to join Jesus at the gate to the sheepfold. After 40 years, I can assure you that you will rarely be comfortable, but will always know meaning, and will – more often than you might believe – feel joy.

## 5th Sunday of Easter – Msgr. LoPinto

May 10, 2020

As we come to this fifth Sunday of Easter, we again find ourselves with the Lord and the disciples in the evening of the Last Supper, as recorded for us by John. And there is a dynamic that's going on here: Jesus is speaking to the disciples and knows what will occur as the evening transgresses, and knows that they will all be very disturbed in the sense of frightened and anxious. And so He opens with the words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," and invites them to faith.

And it's interesting as you progress in the presentation – literally the discourse of Jesus – you find that there are different elements. In one case, Jesus is telling them that he's going, and they want to know where are you going. They're not familiar with that. In Jesus comes with that very beautiful



line: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life,” then He goes on and talks about His identity. This is a critical part of the presentation, for Jesus basically is announcing to them the intimacy that is there between Himself and the Father.

Later on in the discourse, he will bring in the gift of the Spirit. But what I want to call to your attention is something that goes on between Philip and Jesus, for, look, speaking for the group, he says, “show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” But prior to that, Jesus said to them, “if you know me, then you will also know my father. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” There is an element in John’s Gospel of time as John presents it, and one of the kind of – how could I put it – it’s one of the pieces of that element, that exposure of time is the fact that Jesus is talking in the context of that moment. But he’s also talking about what is to come, and in effect, what he is basically saying to

them is that what they will be experiencing – remember, John is writing this well after probably 70 or 80 years after the actual event of the Paschal mystery – and what Jesus is saying is the Paschal mystery and the event of his passion, death and resurrection changes history for all time.

And so, he says very clearly to them that if you know Me then you will know My Father. From now on you do know him and have seen Him. In a sense, you are living in a new time moment, a new moment of time. For you are living in the eternal presence of God and that is what should be at the core at the heart of who you are and what you are about. And when you go to the Letter from Peter, you find that there is again a very beautiful presentation of the reality of the Church. But within the mystery of the reality of the Church – you're a chosen priest, you're chosen people, a holy priesthood – there is what you are called to do: you are called to announce what are

you called to announce. You are called to announce this new reality and this new reality is most effectively pronounced through the dynamism of the church, which continues to evolve itself. We tend to think of all of these things as having a future and therefore static in the moment but the reality is that the future is now and there is no static – there is dynamism, and the dynamic is the ongoing evolution of the Church as it responds to the new situations in which it finds itself each day.

And that's what that first reading from the Acts of the Apostles is about: they found themselves in a new situation – the Greeks were coming, and there was a concern as to how will we incorporate service for all. And they had to make a decision, but they did not make it in isolation – then they reflected on it and they presented it to the community and they didn't go forward with it until the community accepted it. And then they

established what we have come to know in our own day as the order of Deacons. But the reality is that it was the dynamism of the community, gathered in the Lord with the gift of the Spirit, in turn, allowed them to live in a moment – the new moment being this new stage of bringing greatest sense of service to the larger community, which was evolving. When you look at the history of the Church, you find that that's at the heart.

I think of the story of Gregory the Great, who was faced with a time of great famine and a time of great persecution against the Jewish community, and he had to deal with not only how do you preserve the reality of Rome at that moment in crisis, and how do you also care for those who are the most maligned. And what he did was very simple: he opened up the papal granaries and said, let us provide food for all without distinction. It was a new moment, because in his sense he was making by his

actions, he was announcing a new reality, that there was no distinction, but there was care for all.

And you continued through the history of the Church, and often think of Mother Teresa and her experience – you know in a sense was doing what no one else would do: providing care for the neglected, for the dying, and in the sense those who were abandoned she creates a community, the Missionaries of Charity, and they go out into the streets and they were priceless. I had the opportunity to be engaged with them when I worked in Washington, and I'll never forget how they would come on Sunday morning with the station wagon filled with all the kids and I remember asking them one day so where did you find all these children and they said, Oh simple Father – we take the van, the station wagon, which we don't have registered or have a license to drive, but we take it and we go to the projects and we

gather up all the children that are there and we bring them with us and they would fill the church. And you would say, there they live in the Lord and they announce the newness of life discovered in the Lord. A newness of life of being at one with God, and they had no fear of doing it. They didn't mind – in a sense they weren't static. They weren't going to follow all the rules and regulations. They'd make the rest of us very nervous. But they wouldn't follow the rules and regulations: they lived the dynamism of God's love.

In a sense, I think that's what the scripture is reminding us today: that we are a community that is called to announce the dynamism of God's love, and we do that in so many different ways. We do it by what you're doing – as Father Smith has organized, you're doing it by calling people who are isolated and alone this moment of time, this time of tragedy, this pandemic. You do it by the wonderful

donations — and this week Father [Smith] transferred to Catholic Charities \$3,500, which are your donations and they allowed the dynamism of love to go on through Catholic Charities as we continue the feeding program over the past few weeks. We've provided probably close to 60,000 meals: 10,000 people, families who have been served in our pop-ups that we do every Friday.

I don't want to be critical of government, but then you know I'm never too shy of speaking of negativity, the negativity of government, as they try to figure out what there should be happening in these situations. Now, you might have heard the governor about a week ago discovering that there was excess food up in upstate New York, that people were, in a sense the farmers and everything. Well, let me tell you that when this happened, when we first became aware of it, we and Catholic Charities reached out to the farmers in upstate New

York and we have trucks that go back and forth every week bringing down to the people here in the city who are in need: fruit and vegetables, fresh fruit and fresh vegetables, because we know that that's critical to the nourishment of people.

It's the dynamism of love that allows us the freedom to do what others cannot do, because they're caught up in the bureaucracies and the structures of the moment. It's like that first reading: the Apostles could have said, listen, we're sorry we can't feed those people, because our structure says this is what we're supposed to do.

They said no, we can change structures – we can in a sense evolve them and let them be more responsive to the situations we find ourselves in every day, so that the dynamism of God's love recreates the face of the earth.



## 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Msgr. LoPinto

June 22, 2020

*Msgr. LoPinto is the President and CEO of Catholic Charities, Brooklyn & Queens.*

It struck me at the beginning that we are observing the Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Yet reality is that there's nothing ordinary about the time. I'm not sure there ever is anything ordinary about the time – in the sense of, if not all time has a character of being extraordinary – in the sense that we're always dealing with the unexpected, with the surprises that God places in our way.

And certainly the idea of God surprising us is very much a part of the scripture for this 12th Sunday. The first reading – Jeremiah. Jeremiah – who has been anointed by God to deliver God's word to the people – is constantly surprised by the

reaction he gets: a reaction that basically puts him ever at risk. He's imprisoned. There are those who would try to kill him. He must tell the people about in a sense trusting in God by placing themselves in God's hands as they are led off into captivity. And so, in a sense, he is a person who must deal with fear – the fear for his own personal life, but he's only able to deal with that because he has encountered the Lord. And because he has encountered the Lord, he trusts. And he trusts that even though he doesn't understand – he can't comprehend, for the most part, God's plan. He's able to trust – he's able to trust, because in his own way, he has come to know God.

The result of the encounter – when you come to the Gospel, you see a similar situation: Jesus is preparing to send the disciples out. It's referred to in Matthew, which is referred to as the Discipleship section. The homily that He gives teaching and as

He prepares them to go out, He prepares them not for celebration, not for joy, not for all kinds of laurels that be thrown at them, but He prepares them for the fact that they will experience difficulty. They will experience struggle. They will be challenged. And basically what He's calling them to is trust.

That trust I think is based on the fact that prior to this point in Matthew's Gospel, they have encountered the Lord. They have been with Him. They've walked with Him. They've journeyed with Him. They've been with Him day and they've been with Him night. They've seen not only the wonderful things He has done, but they've seen the power of His word. And He basically is now building off of that because He's saying trust, trust in the father, who I have introduced you, to trust in the Father who I have allowed you to encounter through me, and find in that trust the courage to go

forward. The courage to do the work of God, even though it won't always be clear to you. It won't always be in a sense laid out to you, like one of those great plans that we often come up with that usually lasts about three seconds, because of all the extraordinary things that get in the way.

And so trust is a critical component of faith. You go to that second reading – Saint Paul to the Romans. It's also about trust – trust the God who loves you, trust the God who has redeemed you, trust the God who has opened the door for you to a new life. As we live through, excuse me, as we live through the extraordinary events of our own day, we know that fear is very much a part of everyone's life at this moment. The fear that produces all the anxiety that is there, not knowing what tomorrow will bring.

Tomorrow, we enter Stage Two here in New York City. What will it bring? Who knows? Will it bring a new threat, in the sense of a new expression or some new component of the virus manifesting itself? Will it in a sense cause more difficulties, more struggles? Who knows? We'll do the best we can, because we can. But I think the thing that will again make the difference is the extent that we trust: we trust in God to give us the strength to be able to deal with whatever the extraordinary events are.

You know, for the past few Fridays I've been going out to the pop-ups that Catholic Charities has been running – excuse me – the pop-ups for food distribution, and one of the things that's amazing there – you want to see how trust, how trust gets built among people? It's amazing to see the trust that's manifested by the people who come as volunteers. They come into settings that basically we invite them to, but they don't know what they're

coming into. They don't know what the neighborhoods are for the most part or anything. They don't know who they're going to be meeting. They don't know who they're going to be reacting or interacting with. And yet, they come.

They come because they trust, and it's not that they trust in Catholic Charities – I'm not sure anybody trusts in Catholic Charities. It's just life as it goes on. But I think they come because they trust in God, and so we always open with some type of a prayer service. And you can see their engagement in that they trust that God is calling them to give expressions of love to those who are in need. God is calling them to be God's hands in the midst of these extraordinary times.

In a sense, I think that is really the great lesson that is placed before us. That trust is going to give us the ability, the strength, the courage to do what

God is asking us to do: to be God's hands in the midst of these very difficult times. And through that, to be support – support that manifests God's love by that phone call you make to that person – the elderly person who's in a sense isolated in their home. The fact that you come with Father Bill on Thursday mornings or on Fridays to help with the food distributions. The fact that you are wearing a mask and following the rules of social distancing, because you have care and concern for others.

You trust, you trust that God has called us – not only to be connected with God, but that God has called us to be connected with one another.

## **Most Holy Trinity – Fr. Smith**

June 7, 2020

How strong is love? Let us make it personal. “How much do any one of us make decisions because of love”. Do we think that love is nice but real-world decisions are based on how much we will make or how we can appease or use the prevailing social and political powers? Today, we celebrate the feast of the Holy Trinity. This is God’s answer to this question, and it comes none too soon.

During the Easter Season we read in the Gospel of John:

On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you. (Jn 14:20)

As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love (Jn 15:9).



... so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. (Jn 17:21)

The God revealed in Jesus wishes to be seen as relationships. Because these relationships are loving, they are personal. Indeed, the most accurate definition of a person is simply someone who is loved. Most extraordinary of all, Jesus invites us to join in that love.

The clearest image that we have of God is of a community - indeed a family - and one in which we can participate.

We participate by treating others as persons:

<sup>34</sup> I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.

<sup>35</sup> This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Jn 13:34–35

We do not call God Father and ourselves brothers and sisters out of polite convention but as a description of reality. Only if I see you as my brother or sister as infinitely and irreversibly precious can I obey God and become who He calls me to be.

We see this in our individual lives. A heart doctor was asked what people should do to maintain good heart functions during the pandemic. He said what would be expected: exercise, employ a rational diet and remember to take medication. He then stopped, and with some hesitation, said: “maintain personal relationships”. He acknowledged that this did not sound very scientific, but he assured his audience that it was true. This

should come as no surprise to us - this is the first thing to remember. God has made us this way. We can only thrive together.

Sin ultimately is anything which causes this community to deteriorate. It begins by seeing another person as different from ourselves. There is never an insignificant distinction.

Once we divide: native or foreigner, male or female, straight or gay, born or unborn, we are on a very slippery slope which with unseemly speed ends in seeing others as competitors. Then the more powerful will declare themselves superior and all others to varying degrees' inferior.

In America, the fatal distinction is race. A belief that difference essentially in skin color defines who we are with people of white skin superior to people with dark skin. This is the original sin of

America not only because it is so old but because it is so deep and so wide.

We have seen it develop over the last few months with the disparity between the death rates of white and black people with COVID-19, black people make up 13 percent of the population but have experienced 24% of COVID related deaths, and very recently with the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in macabre police actions.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The following Parish Pastoral Council statement was announced at the previous Sunday's Mass on May 31, 2020:

"We would like to take this moment to reflect together on what is going on in our country today.

Today at Pentecost, we celebrate God, the Holy Spirit – the breath of life and the founding of the Church, a community commissioned to spread the Good News of God's love, to serve God's people everywhere, speaking to them in every language.

Would either of these events have occurred to white people who legislators and police considered brothers and sisters?

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So let us say this plainly. George Floyd's killing was unjustified. Breonna Taylor's killing was unjustified. The 100,000 Americans killed by COVID-19 were unjustified. They were denied their breath of life because of racial, social, and economic inequality. They were denied their breath of life because there are those who believe that to enrich and advance themselves, others must suffer. The daily bad news cycle of demeaning words and anonymous deaths has made us numb to the fact that this is wrong.

We believe that to love God we must love each other as ourselves. We call upon all of us to raise our voices to build up a more just society that serves everyone with dignity, rather than one that oppresses and tears people down.

Let us value each other more than we value our accounts. Let us redouble our efforts to care for each other and to be concerned for our world.

This Pentecost, let us speak each other's language."

Lack of brotherly love is literally against nature and its fruits are fear and anger. We have seen this all around us.

What can we do? As citizens we can take appropriate action. Knowing now, unambiguously, that better health care can prevent death we can hold our legislators to account and be certain that health care is provided to all. We can forbid the kinds of policing that are virtually guaranteed to be abused, like choke holds and “Stand your ground laws”.

We can also be more specific. We have heard calls to upgrade curriculum to include the history of racism. A splendid idea. Do you know how these decisions are made and who makes them? Do you have a relationship with any of these people? How could you become one of them? The danger in crisis situations is to think only in terms of massive

structural change and not see what we can do to organize here and now to make local tangible change in less time than you might imagine. Build from there.

So, I ask again: how strong, how real do you consider love? Our faith in the Trinity tells us as Catholic Christians that what is not based on mutual love - relations between equal persons - will ultimately betray us. Do we believe that God's love is as solid as wood and more powerful than the principalities and powers that seem to dominate our lives?

It is not as if we do not have a modern example.

Historian Taylor Branch wrote a multi-volume biography of Martin Luther King subtitled, "America in the King Years". He believed that there was a second American revolution between 1955 and 1968 and that Dr. King was its George

Washington. Civil rights were part of it, but its defining characteristic was nonviolence. Dr. King and his associates saw their opponents as brothers and sisters and acted accordingly. This was and is not a strategic move as much as a recognition of the deepest reality.

It is now fashionable to criticize Dr. King and those original leaders. Yet I ask those who do to show me their victories? What have they done, what have they accomplished? The successes that I have seen have come out of the churches that have carried the touch of the primacy of love. Many of us in the parish who have become involved in the work of Catholic Charities during the pandemic have seen this flame still burning.

Yet there is a point, indeed two, to this criticism and Dr. King knew them well. The first was the extent that the fear and anger caused by



racism had to be addressed on many fronts. Racism is the COVID-19 of our country because it reveals and uses every other evil. Dr. King opposed the war in Vietnam, although this lost the support of President Johnson. He sought greater economic equality for all people. This lost some union allies. Politically these were bad moves in the short term, but he has been vindicated. Whatever tactical gains he might have lost ignoring these issues would have morally eviscerated the movement.

The second was the breath of the coalition. There were white people often on the front lines and I am proud of the priests and sisters who participated, but where were the bankers, the mechanics, policemen and perhaps most importantly the blue collar union men like my father and grandfathers? Whole sectors of society were and indeed are missing from this effort, and

without them – us – we cannot expect a truly national conversion.

Options will develop and we must be prepared to choose both as individuals and as a parish in what we wish to be involved. My personal wish is to be at a prayer service with both members of the police force and members of the wider Catholic community, black and white, speaking every language and praying with each other, even more than for each other.

What is not based on the love revealed by Jesus may be a real reform, but it will not cure the underlying condition. Injustice is almost infinitely creative and will reappear in another guise. If we do not see each other as persons – brothers and sisters – we will find a reason to hate and exploit.

How much will we risk for love?

“No Justice. No Peace” is often heard and much chanted. But the Christian message is, “No Love, No Justice”.

## **Corpus Christi – Fr. Gribowich**

June 14, 2020

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the rectory of St. Charles Borromeo, especially to our brothers and sisters at St. Augustine and St. Francis Xavier. As many you may know by now, I was appointed the administrator to these two great parishes in Park Slope, and so until we actually are able to meet in person, perhaps it's a great opportunity for all of us to get to know each other virtually by logging on to the Zoom here that we have at St. Charles Borromeo where I live. It's interesting too, for those who may be unfamiliar with Zoom, you'll quickly find out that your favorite button on there being Mute, so when there's things going on where you are – they're making a lot of noise, make sure you Mute yourself. And if you're the type of person who maybe just

rolled out of bed, then the Video button also is another great button to turn that off. So, the Mute and the Video buttons are important buttons to get comfortable with as we go through this age of having Zoom masses.

First of all, I just like to also bring a lot of thanks to Mike McGowan, who's done so much in organizing the tech end of things, allowing people in, that's who brought you in on the meeting today, and Francis Chin, who's his right-hand man and who also I guess we could call the M.C. or the D.J. of the Mass, since he's able to bring in music and all the other components in order to make this a very full experience. And I think it really shows the great dedication of lay members of the parish working together to bring forth during this very difficult time really a taste of home, so to speak, and so a great blessing to be able to hear the music that's often that's sung here at St. Charles Borromeo –

amazing music program <sup>4</sup> here, as I know St. Augustine and St. Francis have great music programs as well. So this is just a taste of what is possible during this age of virtual Mass, which hopefully will not last too long, but I think that we will still be meeting this way for some time, at least in complementing our in-person meetings, which will happen soon.

It's interesting to begin, so to speak, my ministry, if you will, at St. Augustine and at St. Francis Xavier on this feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, Corpus Christi. Because if there's one thing that brings the parish community together, it is the celebration of the Eucharist, and as we can hear in the readings,

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<sup>4</sup> Sergio Sandí - Director of Music, Piano; Coco Leung – Piano; Cantor, Soprano; Ulises Solano - Cantor, Tenor; Ann Bordley – Flute

especially our Gospel, there's a great emphasis placed on the reception of the Eucharist: you must eat my flesh, drink my blood, have eternal life. Jesus says it only about 900 times in this chapter and he says it in such a way to make it very clear that there's something very, very essential in the Christian life that's connected to a participation in the celebration of the Eucharist.

And I think for us as Catholics we can sometimes look at this as our card of victory or so of our way of looking at how we're very distinct from maybe other Christian traditions, because of how much we rely on the sacrament of the Eucharist playing a role in our Christian life – and rightfully so. Yet we know over the last three months, this is the one thing that we've not been doing: we have not been going to Mass, we've not been receiving Eucharist. Of course, you've been experiencing this one online, but not in person, so it really challenges

us as Catholics when we understand that the Eucharist is so important, and Jesus himself says it is so important to receive Me, and then to not have an opportunity.

I think, though, if we look at the state of our world right now this great feast of the Body and Blood of Christ is revealing to us that the Eucharist is something that is not just celebrated at Mass, it's something that is realized in so many other ways, in our time and in our society, in our world. Now, I don't mean this is a way to belittle the celebration of the Eucharist, because it's the very celebration of the Eucharist that allows us to be able to see all these intricacies throughout.

We talked about the Body and Blood of Christ. The body of Christ really is the human family – the human race, if you will. Yet, we can be more specific and say it's the body of believers, the Christian



family, the church. But yet, the body of Christ is everyone: everyone makes up the body of Christ. Whether one knows it or not, whether one has professed it or not. Everyone somehow participates in this Body, and St. Paul is so good at always talking about how the members of the body work with each other in unison and forming a wholeness.

And I think that the recent events of the last couple of weeks have really showed how the body functions as being a force for healing. I mean I think all of us are still just completely in a haze, if you will, knowing about the horrible death of George Floyd. I know it was something that I cannot get out of my mind. If anyone's actually watched all eight minutes and 46 seconds of this video, of watching a man – his life being extinguished – it is something that will just be ingrained with you for probably forever. There's no other way around it.

But yet, if we notice as this man, this person, this member of the body, his life being extinguished, how many of the rest of us ran to this man's help – if you will – ran to rally around this man's life as a way to try to bring to the forefront that means of bringing healing to our society. It showed this amazing amount of unity, and people who probably were not even thinking about, say the race issue or police brutality, we're coming out of the woodwork, to say that there's something really fundamentally wrong. It was this great moment of unity and it exposed the fact that one person's wound is an opportunity for many people to run to heal. Yet quickly we know that what this also facilitated was all of our own individual wounds to be exposed. The great unrest in all of our cities, and the great unrest throughout all of our country, really, exposes that all of us have wounds that need to be healed.

And all those wounds are found in just our anger that may feel right now, our frustrations, our desire to work for change, our desire to be frustrated, not knowing how change may come about. Maybe just the same old story happening again and again. And getting tired of being sick and tired, as Fannie Lou Hamer used to say.

We look at this as being in a moment where we're kind of lost, that the pandemic in and of itself was a moment for making us realize, like what do we do next? When's this going to end? And now to add this into the mix has made us realize that we need a lot of healing, and the healing happens one person at a time. And when we think about the Body and Blood of Christ, we emphasize the fact that Body and Blood are separated. It just exposes to us the reality that Christ's Body and Blood were separated on the cross, but the suffering of Christ is connected to our suffering. And because of that, the

only way to move forward and to heal is going to be through that same bar.

You know there's been so much talk over the last few weeks about racism, white privilege and we throw these terms around all the time, and we don't even may be fully understand what these terms even mean. It's hard for us to have a full definition of what exactly is racist and what exactly is white privilege.

But I think as Catholic Christians, I think we can make it kind of simple, you know, when we come to a realization that the God who willed us into existence willed the person in front of us into existence. When we come to that awareness, that's when we're able to recognize our shortcomings and how we've not been able to respect our brother and our sister in front of us. Because if the same God who willed us into existence willed our brother and

sister into existence, what are we other to do than to act in a spirit of reverence to this member of the Body: the same type of reverence we would bring into the church and we get down on our knees in front of the tabernacle.

That is the reality of the body of Christ that we are experiencing right now: the broken body of Christ, hung on the cross, but still very much very part of who God is today. We look at the Body and Blood of Christ – Eucharist – to affirm who we are, or better yet, whose we are: beloved sons and daughters of a loving God. But more importantly, too, we also recognize the fact that we are brothers and sisters in Christ, we share a commonality and that's why I think it's just so providential that we are able to meet this way: three different parish communities on this Zoom call right now watching this online Mass. This right here is an opportunity for working towards genuine change in our society.

We all know that discrimination does not just happen in the secular world. We all know that we make distinctions and separation amongst us as Catholics and we all have an almost a type of competitiveness sometimes when it looks at different communities. We know that there's different ideologies, of different pastoral visions, of different theological insights, that we all kind of argue and bicker about, but yet the very fact that the three communities right now can be on this one call, so to speak, is an opportunity to show that we can work with each other, to recognize the fact that our brother and sister has been willed into existence by the same loving God, willed us into existence our very person into existence, and that to me is a great opportunity of hope. Amazing things can happen if all of us work together.

I don't foresee me kind of necessarily checking out of St. Charles Borromeo once I fully move into

my role at St. Augustine and St. Francis Xavier – not because I want to hold on to some type of sentimentality here but because of the fact I need this community of St. Charles just as much as I need St. Augustine and Saint Francis Xavier because I learn from all of you. I'm being formed by the body of Christ around and what a great opportunity for us to be able to inform each other, learn from each other listen to each other.

There's a great opportunity that we have right now that the fact that our churches are just open for prayer, that there's no sacraments going on and for many of us maybe feel like, well if we're opening the doors I know we just have Mass and there might be something to say about that, but the very fact that we just have the doors open for prayer gives us a great opportunity to sit and listen. Because if we want to understand how Christ can work in our lives right now when we're not actually receiving his

Body and Blood, we're being able to listen to the cries of the body within us and around us.

Jesus not only knows our sufferings, but he also knows the sufferings of our brothers and sisters – which by the way our sufferings that we do not know. We do not know the sufferings that our brothers and sisters are going through, and during this time where it's so easy for us to come to conclusions or to judge or just think that we know exactly what has to happen, and how it has to happen, the opportunity to listen to our hearts can hopefully allow our minds to be opened to the fact that the sufferings of our brothers and sisters around us are real. And they're ones that we do not know anything about. But the same Christ who knows our sufferings, knows their sufferings. It's ever more important for us to be in communion with that one Christ who unites us.



So today on this great feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, let us be ever mindful that our Lord is still with us. Our Lord still loves us. But more importantly, our Lord is actually alive in His Body and Blood in the midst of the suffering that we are currently in, and that is the way that we are able to open ourselves to the healing, the grace of the Resurrection that He desires to give to us.

May God bless you all.

## 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Fr. Gribowich

July 6, 2020

*Churches in Brooklyn reopened for public Mass this week, taking precautions for COVID-19, while also continuing livestreaming online via Zoom and YouTube. Jane Olson and Joseph Genova lead the Re-Opening Committee.*

Good morning, everyone! It's so such a great blessing to be back here physically in the church. I know it's still kind of awkward – I have to just be looking in one direction it seems like at this Mass, as this side has been quarantined off, except for Monsignor [LoPinto] – so thank you for holding the fort down on that side of the church.

And as well a very warm welcome to all the brothers and sisters at St. Augustine, St. Francis Xavier, anyone else you may be zooming in to this

Mass. So as you know, we're going to be doing this hybrid type of model for some time where we are able to gather in person, but we'll be continuing to be able to Zoom the Mass as well. So once you are feeling comfortable to return, you can return, but until that time, you can also just be able to continue to Zoom into the Mass.

You know, this is the Fourth of July weekend and I hope that everyone is able to in some way rest, and our Lord today in the gospel is out finding rest. My question really is, what does it mean to rest in the Lord? It's an expression that sometimes often said by spiritually minded people saying you need to rest clearly that's what Jesus asked us to do come to me and rest in my presence. Now it's interesting because, right now during this time we have been able to somehow slow down – we asked people to stay home than that we would even like. The question really remains, have we been able to find

rest during this time? We've been able to enter into a place of respite in the Lord.

It was right after World War 2 that a German philosopher, Josef Piepe, wrote a really small book – you can see how thin it is – called *Leisure: the Basis of Culture*, and he makes a very strong argument saying that we don't understand the value of leisure, we only understand how valuable we are as a people. And I realize now this is a strange thing coming from a philosopher right after World War 2, where there were lots of things happening to try to rebuild the broken world. We all know that after wartime there was a great economic boom – the United States especially, there is a great pride and value placed on work and hard work. And yet Piepe completely takes a totally different angle, saying it's not really work where you find your meaning – it's in leisure. And what's he trying to get at? Well, the thrust of his argument was that only when we were able

to be in a time of receptivity, where we able to know what we asked, where to direct our attention, to know what we're called to do.

Now this is very hard for us sometimes to think about, because especially during this time when we're into our computers and filing email after email, website after website, and phone call and phone call, Zoom call after Zoom call, I presume keep on going and going, and that you're never even able to process or to determine what really need to bring my attention to. Everything seems to almost be automatically mapped out for us, because we just keep on going, and going, and going. And we've heard a lot of us have been at home working more than ever before.

But yet, the Lord in the Gospel today – and this is what people are also affirming today – at the end of the day, our work does not really amount to

much. At the end of the day, all will leave this world. Some of our work may be remembered by people. Much of it will be forgotten. Our legacy is something that has a big question mark.

And when we think about things in that way, we automatically just stopped in our tracks thinking, what is it really am I doing? What am I really living for? Because, see, living in the Lord is a way for us to be thankful for the gift of life in the first place. Resting in the Lord is to be able to contemplate the vocation that the Lord has for us, that he calls us to be in this world and calls us to prepare ourselves and also to prepare those around us for how we are going to spend eternity.

We all know that this world will pass away. We all know that our roles will pass away. The only question we have to ask of ourselves is how can we allow ourselves to rest, so that we know how to

receive God's blessings, so that we know to be more mindful of what we lack around us and draw our attention to those things.

This is a very bittersweet Fourth of July. I mean, it's not just celebrating the great birth of our country and certain freedoms that we're grateful to receive. I know there's great societal unrest, and you just can't pretend everything's great because this is the Fourth of July and there's fireworks. We all know that tomorrow, there's going to be more unrest, probably. There will be people still upset – lots of things from our past, from our history, and we see things that are being corrupted. We see all these individual people, who in some way shape or form are glorified with statutes. Perhaps we should ask ourselves the question, how do we trust in the Lord? ... For these different figures, the only thing that matters is what they were called to do and how do they respond.

Life is about participation, not orchestration... in the Body and how we respond and present to them because they were resting in the Lord's presence around. It's the people and it's those moments that they live – they can be examples for us. On the other side, those people who have used their time and need a circus to happen, has led to great, great unrest, because it's through that orchestration that people feel as if only certain people move ahead – whether it's economic decisions were made, political decisions were made. All these things are ways that people are trying to get ahead to push some agenda. Orchestration is what leads us into untrustworthy behavior. Let's rejoice in the fact that we can walk together in this journey of life, as we are able to physically see each other. Be grateful for the gift of life.

As we come back together on this Fourth of July weekend, let us be mindful of how much our



great people are able to allow us to rest in the Lord. We also come here as sinners, knowing that none of us are perfect. All of us share some type of wound or brokenness. And we come here to this table, recognizing the fact that we need to rest more. We need to enjoy the Sabbath more – not as a time to just switch off from work, but for us to be able to reflect upon who we are and what we're doing, so that when Monday shows up, we will be able to better understand how do I direct my attention to what the Lord is calling me to do. And that's how we're able to rest in the Lord, not just on this day, but throughout the week because we understand our role as participants in this great body of Christ that we all make. Let us rejoice especially in the fact that we are able to affirm our identity in the Body by receiving Christ at Mass.

May God bless you all.

## 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Fr. Smith

August 3, 2020

Whenever St. Matthew makes a reference to a previous event, he is telling us to take it very seriously. He begins today with “when Jesus heard of it”. The it was the section immediately preceding this one usually called the martyrdom of St. John the Baptist. Yet Matthew will emphasize the dinner at which it occurred and as we prepare for the next stage in our lives as Christians in general and members of St. Charles Borromeo Church in particular, so should we.

St. Matthew has shortened St. Mark’s version of this story, but the outlines are still there. John had condemned Herod for marrying his brother’s wife Herodias. John was popular among the people and Herod did not want him free to preach rebellion but also did not want to make a martyr of

him. At his birthday banquet, Herodias' daughter performed a dance, which we may presume lascivious. This delighted Herod and, no doubt influenced by alcohol, he offered her anything she wanted. He perhaps thought she would want a necklace or fine linens but at her mother's urging she asked for the head of John the Baptizer. Meals are revelatory in the Bible, and this one certainly revealed a dysfunctional family and a world closed in on itself. John was immediately executed and after his disciples buried him, they went to Jesus.

This is where our passage begins.

Here we have a totally different dynamic. Jesus goes out to the crowd which was following him and unlike Herod who was motivated by lust and calculation, Jesus was filled with pity and his heart went out to them. He cured their sick, certainly a great gift, but then offered them something more.

Miracles usually begin with something physical but then reveal another dimension. So it is here. It is late and the people were getting hungry and needed to eat. The disciples suggest that Jesus send them away. Jesus does not cast out he brings in and tells them to give them something to eat themselves. All they have are “five loaves and two fish”. He tells the people to recline, takes the bread and fish, looks up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves. The apostles were then able to feed everyone till they were satisfied.

The Jews both in Jesus’ original audience and in Matthew’s community would have seen many references to the Old Testament. (I have put some of these on our website for your inspection)<sup>5</sup>. All

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<sup>5</sup> Supplemental readings:

1 Ki 17:8–18 So the LORD said to him:

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9 “Move on to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have designated a widow there to provide for you.”

10 He left and went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the entrance of the city, a widow was gathering sticks there; he called out to her, “Please bring me a small cupful of water to drink.”

11 She left to get it, and he called out after her, “Please bring along a bit of bread.”

12 “As the LORD, your God, lives,” she answered, “I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar and a little oil in my jug. Just now I was collecting a couple of sticks, to go in and prepare something for myself and my son; when we have eaten it, we shall die.”

13 “Do not be afraid,” Elijah said to her. “Go and do as you propose. But first make me a little cake and bring it to me. Then you can prepare something for yourself and your son. 14 For the LORD, the God of Israel, says, “The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the LORD sends rain upon the earth.””

15 She left and did as Elijah had said. She was able to eat for a year, and he and her son as well; 16 The jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, as the LORD had foretold through Elijah.

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Christians however would recognize both the last supper and our own Eucharists. (The Last Supper in Matthew is also included on the website.)<sup>6</sup> It too

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17 Some time later the son of the mistress of the house fell sick, and his sickness grew more severe until he stopped breathing. 18 So she said to Elijah, “Why have you done this to me, O man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?”

2 Ki 4:42–44

42 A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, “Give it to the people and let them eat.” 43 But his servant said, “How can I set this before a hundred people?” So he repeated, “Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the LORD, ‘They shall eat and have some left.’” 44 He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of the LORD.

<sup>6</sup> References to the Last Supper:

Mt 26:26

was in the night, the apostles reclined as for a formal dinner, Jesus blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples. He then told them that he would celebrate this again with them in the Kingdom.

We must remember that the kingdom does not mean only heaven. The kingdom as we have seen in the parables, we have read for the last several weeks is already here in the ministry of Jesus and then the Church but not yet completed. We can begin our

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26 While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."

1 Co 11:23–24

23 For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

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celebration here and now and unlike the Herod's this meal brings life.

We need to look at one other detail.

After all were satisfied, they “picked up the fragments left over, twelve wicker baskets full”.

Twelve reflect the twelve tribes of the Jewish people. He makes twelve disciples apostles and gives them authority over these tribes. Yet the twelve tribes did not exist for centuries. The 10 tribes of the northern kingdom were dispersed with the Assyrian invasion of 721 BC. Even the Judeans were divided by the Babylonians centuries later. This would be like putting the toothpaste back in the tube. It humanly can't be done. Yet this was a sign of the Messiah. The Jews called it the ingathering of the people.



The gathering of the fragments into 12 baskets was a sign that the Eucharist which would develop and which the 12 would celebrate would fulfill this requirement. The original members of Matthew's community were born Jews and would have responded to this very favorably. Yet always with Matthew Jesus is expanding the notion of community. He ends his Gospel with the great command

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit,

This might not have been as well-accepted by them, but Matthew did not see the Church destroying Judaism or even replacing it, but expanding it. We will see for the next 2 weeks in our reading from the letter to the Romans how Paul

develops this idea but we will need to ask ourselves as we renew St. Charles how we are going to live it.

The Second Vatican Council referred to the Eucharist as the “source and summit of the Christian life”. Every aspect of our faith is connected and energized by it. But Eucharist is a verb. Its celebration creates and maintains our covenant relationship with God and our fellow humans. We have celebrated the Eucharist properly when we deepen those relationships. At our Thursday night book club, we read that “Eucharist makes the Church”. I know I have truly participated in Sunday Mass when I have allowed the liturgy to strengthen my relationships with others during the week. This is what makes the church and reflects the true meaning of today’s miracle and the Last Supper.

As we return to, renew and revise St. Charles, we must first recognize the importance of the

Eucharist. Let us ask ourselves who we want our community to serve and what relationships will be necessary to do it. We will discover that we cannot do it by ourselves, we need the Lord. Just as the Lord expanded the loaves and the fish to feed a multitude in 1<sup>st</sup> century Galilee, he will expand us as individuals and as a community to celebrate the Kingdom with him in Brooklyn.

## 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Msgr. LoPinto

August 9, 2020

I think to be able to come to grips with the Gospel selection of today, it is important to connect it with the Gospel of last week, when we saw Jesus feed the thousands with the five loaves and the two fish. If you remember that story, the disciples come to him and tell Jesus to let the people go home because they're concerned that there isn't food for them and there are no places in that vicinity where they will be able to buy food.

Jesus says to them, well tell me what you have. And they say all we have are five loaves of bread and two fish – what good will that do with all these people? Remember the number that's given us is five thousand plus the women and children.

And Jesus simply says to them, bring me what you have. And he blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them to distribute. And all of the people are fed, and there are 12 baskets left over.

The story picks up here. Jesus says to the disciples that they should get in the boat and they should go to the other side and he'll meet them there. And then he dismisses the crowd and he goes off to pray on the mountain alone.

But I ask you to give yourselves a few minutes to reflect on what it must have been like in that boat. As the disciples are there, how they must have been one. How did he do that? How did he feed all those people? What's happening? Confused ... confused is probably the best word, and so they take off in the boat. And lo and behold as the night wears on, the wind comes up.

I don't know if you've ever been in a boat when you start out and it's nice and calm, and then the wind picks up. I had that experience many years ago out in California. A friend of mine had a boat, and he said let's take a trip to Catalina – the island off the shore of California, the southern shore.

Oh yeah, that's great. Fine. You know we went going over – water was as calm as one could imagine – and we made it over there in no time and we spent the beautiful day on Catalina wandering around having lunch and everything.

Then it was time to come back, and so we got, went down to the marina, got the boat. He pulled it out of the marina, and he said to me, well you've had experience driving the boat? Yeah, I'd experienced. He said, take over, drive the boat back to Marina del Rey, where we were going back.

And I said the water was calm, it was fine. I figured what problem is there going to be? We'll speed along and be back to the mainland in no time.

Then the wind came, and all of a sudden the Pacific showed its strength and we had to maneuver the boat through the turbulent waters of the Pacific – a very frightening experience – and I just as I was listening or reflecting on the scripture, I thought what would have happened if, while we were in that turbulent situation trying to make our way safely back to the shore, if somebody had come walking on the water, talked to us, we would have lost control of everything. We would have been totally terrified, thinking that it was an omen, telling us the end was here.

Well, put that in the context of the disciples in the boat. There they are with their oars trying to stabilize the ship, and they see this figure walking

toward them on the water. How terrifying it had to be! They're still trying to figure out what happened on the shore and how all of those people were fed with so little.

So you begin to see the challenge that's in front of them. Jesus senses, He senses their fear, and He calls out to them. But I'm sure as He called out to them and they're in that boat and everything is going up and down, they were probably not even sure they were hearing His voice, because they weren't sure who it was, who was coming toward them.

Whether it was just their imagination at that point, but He calls and tells them not to be afraid, not to be afraid. Peter – who always stands out in the Scriptures – Peter kind of looks and says if it is you Lord, if it is, you tell me to get out of the boat and let me walk to you.



The significance is that Peter is testing. He's testing at this point, are you real? Is this a real moment? Is this really happening? And Jesus says to him, Peter get out of the boat and walk to me. and Peter gets out and starts walking but then the reality of the moment takes over he feels the force of the wind and becomes terrified and he begins to sink and he cries out to Jesus and Jesus reaches and grabs him by the hand and lifts him up. And they both get into the boat and the wind dies down.

I think when you look at these two stories and you put them together, you begin to realize that Matthew was talking more about a little incident on the water. What he was talking about was the reality of church and how church deals with the reality of life. How we deal with the reality of life because what Jesus was showing them was something dramatically different. He was showing them the new creation. He was showing them the

power of God at work in the midst of the reality of the world.

In a sense he was saying, in me there is a new reality. It is the reality of God's new creation and it is manifested in my ability to feed 5,000 and more with the few loaves and the few fish. It's the new reality of my being able to walk toward you on the water and invite you to do the same, to in a sense enter the new creation and be part of this new moment that God has brought into being, by coming to be one with us in our life.

Peter really represents then the challenge, but the challenge is that we get enthusiastic over that. We get excited over it. Then reality comes: the wind, the reality comes, and we say this can't be, this can't be that God has so changed creation that I can see the face of God in another human person. That

can't be. Let's go back to the old way, rather than venturing forth into the new, walking on the water.

Unfortunately, the story – as Matthew captures it – is the story of human history. It's the story of how God is ever drawing us forth and how we continue out of fear to hold back. God calling us forth, we hold back because we're afraid we're going to sink, chaos will emerge.

God forbid that we see the world through the eyes of God. God forbid that we see the face of God in every other human person. God forbid that we build our relationships on that reality. So much easier to revert, it's so much easier to go back to what we know what we've experienced, rather than entrust ourselves into the hand of Jesus and let him lead us as he led Peter, led Peter. Because ultimately Peter learned through experience he learned to trust,

to trust the Lord, and to walk not by his own will, but by the will of God.

And it's the same with us. We have to learn that we have to learn that, and the only way we learn it is by following the example of Jesus in this story, in this episode – an episode that is repeated over and over again in the Scripture. Jesus goes off to pray, he goes off to pray, that he may continue to nurture, and he may continue to be fed with his relationship with the Father. And ultimately it is the relationship with the Father that allows Him to manifest the New Creation, a creation that does not abide by fear, but lives by hope – hope born of the love of God for us.

And so, my friends, as we listen to the Scripture today, it challenges us, challenges us. How willing are we to walk on the water? How willing are we to trust God's love to sustain us that

we may not only live in the New Creation, but be part of God's ongoing effort to build the New Creation, a new creation that will find us living as the beloved community of God. Community, where we truly learn to see in the face of each other the face of God, who chose to be one with us that we could be one with God.

## 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Fr. Smith

August 30, 2020

This is not the Gospel reading I would have chosen for a First Communion. “Satan”, “Cross”, and “losing one’s life” are not the topics that first come to mind on what is truly one of the most joyous days for any parish. Yet if we step back and see how these fit into St. Matthew’s Gospel, it is very joyous indeed given the pandemic, hopefully as well. I will first speak to the adults and then Anya and Evie, making a comment to myself along the way.

This tense dialogue with Peter comes after a much more pleasant one a few paragraphs before. Jesus asks Peter who he thinks he is, and Peter answers “The Messiah”. Jesus is so pleased with this answer that he blesses Peter and tells him that God himself has revealed this to him. He then informs

Peter that he will be the rock on which he will build his church and gives him great authority over who will be part of it.

I hope that everyone has or will have an experience like this: singled out for praise and honor. Pre-COVID, we all could have given great examples, like being praised at a work meeting and given new responsibilities with appropriate compensation. I don't know that this means now when the office is often one's kitchen table. Friends have expressed some regret that they have gotten new positions, but there was not even a lunch to congratulate them in person. Half the fun of getting a scholarship is being congratulated by other students at something public. Zoom just isn't the same. So simply think of what would be the most wonderful thing that could happen to you professionally or personally and that is what Peter experienced.

Yet calling Jesus the Messiah was not completely correct. Jesus is so much more than that and today Jesus will give him a lesson in how much more.

Peter's view of the Messiah was based on earthly power and position. He could see himself as an important person in the religious establishment that would form around Jesus. When Jesus says today that he would be martyred he jeopardizes Peter's future job prospects and indeed his very life. He may say politely that no such thing should happen to you, Jesus, but he is thinking about himself as well.

We might expect that Jesus, kindness itself, will say comforting words to Peter but instead we hear "Get behind me Satan, you are an obstacle to me," Another and more accurate translation of this is "stumbling stone".



He then tells the disciples that they will know that they are truly following him not by the honors they will receive but the comforts they will lose.

This goes against human instinct. So much of life is spent seeking the good things that may be found in the world that we are confused when we are told that joy may be found giving them up.

This is, as Jesus chides Peter for thinking as human beings do. Jesus is very blunt in order to shock Peter into the recognition of this basic truth. For what profit would there be for Peter to become the CEO of Jesus, Inc. but to forfeit his very life?

This passage has taken on new life for me this year. St. Charles was humming along better than any parish in which I was ever involved. We were meeting the needs of a large percentage of our parishioners and had plans that would have included more. There was a Parish plan for the

future and a Parish leadership that could attain it. For me, it seemed an effortless glide to a peaceful retirement. Then COVID-19 hit and everything was derailed.

My reaction after I realized that this was going to be a long haul was:

“God forbid, Lord, no such thing should happen to your church”

Which meant:

“God forbid, Lord, no such thing should happen to me.”

I was thinking as human beings do and showed myself, despite my good intentions, a stumbling stone. And Jesus doesn't fall or fail.

I need to deny myself such great certainty and see where Jesus wishes to lead St. Charles. I expect

to be surprised and at least immediately, not happily. But here faith means following the Spirit of God and learning to do so willingly.

The rhythms of life have been changed and we are all marching to the tune of different drummers. I cannot imagine what working from home means when you have children schooling from home? Perhaps those teaching from home have it even worse, especially primary school teachers. There are also the people who I have met at the Catholic Charities food pantry and the pop ups this summer who will soon be facing eviction as well.

Now you might wonder how I could begin this homily speaking about joy and hope. Simply because anytime we experience Jesus is joyful. Good things can stand in the way of our truly knowing him and when they are stripped away his presence is revealed. Hope is not optimism, but our

commitment to put our trust in the presence of Jesus, that He reminds us that He is revealed not in flesh and blood but by His Heavenly Father.

Matthew shows us how in the next chapter. A mere 6 days after harshly rebuking Peter, He takes him and James and John to a high mountain. First, note that Peter continued to follow Jesus despite being scolded. Second, on the mountain Jesus “was transfigured” before them. There, the Father told them that Jesus was his beloved Son and to listen to him. This was a great gift that Peter would never have been able to experience if he were seeking a messiah which fit his previous preconceptions.

The spiritual lives of so many of us are like Peter’s. We have an idea of Jesus which is comforting until something happens to disturb it and then Jesus can seem very strange and foreign to us. If, like Peter, we still follow Jesus, he will lead us

to a better understanding of him. This is a personal transfiguration. We know him better, even if we still don't understand him.

Now Anya and Evie, let me wish you a blessed First Communion. It is the church's way of saying that you are welcome at the altar. As you get older, you will come to know Jesus better, and like St. Peter today, me and the adults you know there will be times that you will not understand him. When this happens, go to your parents and grandparents, and ask them why they still believe. Listen carefully to their answers. The only real answer to questions about God's actions which we do not understand are experiences of God's love which we share with each other.

## 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Fr. Smith

September 28, 2020

What an ugly week. COVID-19 deaths exceeded 200,000, fires and floods are still ravaging parts of our country and the fight for Ruth Bader Ginsburg's seat is causing an even greater national divide. There were few bright spots but one of them for me was this week's gospel and I hope it will be for you as well. But I warn you that to be enlightened by what it says requires a commitment to follow what it teaches.

First let us look at what Jesus said and to whom he first said it. He is very shrewd. He first tells his listeners that this story will be about a vineyard. Vineyards were used in Jewish storytelling to refer to the entire people. He next asks a son to work in it. The son at first refused but then relents and goes. Then he asks another son to do the same. He at first

agrees but then does not go. When asked about who did the father's will the audience had to admit that it was the first son. Now this is a very special audience. It was composed of chief priests and elders of the people who in the previous chapter asked Jesus from where he got his authority. Jesus replied that he would tell them only if they told him if John's baptism was of God or just a human invention. Knowing that the people considered John a prophet they would not anger them by saying that his baptism was unholy. When Jesus asks about the two sons, he is telling them to look at who is making a difference in the community, the vineyard, and why. People who were the most unlike the leaders – tax collectors and prostitutes – were accepting the invitation to work in the vineyard. They knew that John was righteous and sought forgiveness of their sins. The religious leaders however did not think that they needed to repent and thus accomplished nothing.

Mathew's situation was different. All the gospel writers knew many stories by and about Jesus. They chose the ones that were most meaningful to their realities. Matthew was a pastor, and he was concerned that his parish was overly divided between those born Jews and those born Gentiles. He needed them to work together and this story was very helpful. I am sure that he noticed what pastors, rabbis and imams have always seen, those who do the work, maintain the vineyard if you will, come from every ideological bent and are usually not the most vocal. He is asking his listeners to look at who is actually building the church up. He knows that it will be people from every background: former rabbis working with former devotees of every imaginable god. Then as now the most robust disciples would have been like the tax collectors and prostitutes, people who recognized their need to change and did so. As we saw a few weeks ago, Matthew knows that people will sin and will need



to be forgiven constantly and that God's desire to do so is infinite.

It is not those with the biggest mouths but the biggest hearts that find their way to the vineyard. To paraphrase the psalmist, a broken contrite heart is the price of admission and humility is the ticket. It is not the most eloquent or learned or even the most morally upright or generous that finds him or herself working alongside Jesus, but only those who knowing their sinfulness asks for his forgiveness and grace. This is real love. As Paul reminds the Corinthians: "If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing."

This year of horrors is a great opportunity to seek humility. Next week Pope Francis will issue an encyclical on solidarity: what we owe to each other. It will not be completely agreeable to anyone.

Catholic Social Teaching never is. None of the viable political options open to us sufficiently expresses Catholic Social Teaching that it demands assent. No one can look at another and assume that he or she is completely wrong. This does not mean that we should be paralyzed by perfection. The pure accomplish little in life. No matter what our ultimate political decision we will get our hands dirty; that is the cost of being a citizen in an imperfect world. We may reject another's decision totally but must accept that he or she is acting in good faith and with a clear conscience

That includes not only what we do in this year's presidential election but how we reestablish St. Charles. I ask you to read Donna Whiteford's

reflection on our re-founding in this week's email<sup>7</sup>.  
If you are not on our list, please go to our website

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<sup>7</sup> Donna Whiteford is president of the Parish Pastoral Council.

Dear St. Charles Parish Family and Friends,

It is hard to believe it is the end of September and Fall is definitely here. I often look at each season as both an ending and a beginning – bringing not only new weather and activities but new opportunities. So this got me to thinking about something Fr. Bill said last Sunday before he made the announcements at the end of Mass – about wanting St. Charles to be a faith community where someone knows your name.

Fr. Bill has spoken about how this difficult time we are living through presents us with an opportunity to “re-imagine or re-found” St. Charles. I’ll admit I was confused when he first said this but after a few conversations I understand that he means that this time is an opportunity for us, the St. Charles faith community, to ensure that the parish is reflective of who we, the parishioners, are today, and who we want to be; that it offers all of us both the spiritual and social programs we

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want and need to nurture our faith and our sense of community; and importantly, is a place where someone does know not just our name but, who we are.

As I read recently in *The Universal Christ* by Richard Rohr, O.F.M., Fr. Rohr believes we sometimes focus too much on Jesus the messenger and not enough on the message Jesus came to spread. That message to me is not just about attending Mass on Sunday, but asks each of us to participate fully in the life of our church and community and to be an active part of that community, again where we know each other's names.

How can each of us achieve that full and active participation? I'm hoping that each of you will prayerfully consider how you might become more active in helping St. Charles as we move forward, each in the way most appropriate to your life and family situation. If asked if you can volunteer, please consider what you might be able to do. And even though we are social distancing during these times, don't forget to say hello and ask someone you don't know their name when you are at church. Or ask others in the parish what it means to volunteer at St. Charles.

As it says this Sunday in Paul's letter to the Philippians, "in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others." Can

and sign up. She quotes from this week's second reading from Paul's Letter to the Philippians: "humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others".

Matthew and Paul both have great experience with difficult communities and have much to teach

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you volunteer to help with the food pantry, the Family Faith Program, serve as an Usher so we can hold additional Sunday Masses or serve in another of our lay ministries? We welcome all to volunteer and help the parish, regardless of whether you have one hour or ten to contribute. And we welcome all your thoughts on growing our parish spiritual and social offerings.

Jesus, through the apostles, created a community of active and participative believers. Our parish needs each of us if we are to carry on that tradition today.

Your sister in Christ,  
Donna Whiteford

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us. Notice that they do not tell us to set up exploratory committees nor how to fund raise. They tell us to acknowledge our own sinfulness, forgive each other from our hearts and assume the basic decency of our fellow Christians. Given the talents of the people I see before me I assure you that I and the other parish leaders will be asking for your advice and assistance but again to return to Paul without the humility that comes from love we will be mere “clanging gongs or clashing cymbals”.

If we are to rebuild St. Charles Parish on the firmest possible ground, then it be by humility and the desire for mutual forgiveness and conversion. Our task is not to attain ideological purity, but to build community.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The Blessing of the Animals in honor of St. Francis of Assisi was held at a socially distant Young Professionals meeting on October 4. <https://youtu.be/o0FAU3glpoA>

## 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Fr. Smith

October 19, 2020

My first meeting with community organizers was memorable. A group of Catholic pastors in Bed-Stuy recognized that many of our parishioners were being displaced by real estate predators and that we wanted to combat this. When I entered the meeting room, the lead organizer, who has since become a mentor and friend, looked at me and said, “Here comes the problem.”

I was taken aback, but he explained that he did not mean this personally, but that I was of the ‘60s generation which tends to be anti-institutional. He told us immediately that we would help our parishioners keep their homes only by using and strengthening institutions. If we were not prepared to do that our time could be better spent helping them move their furniture on to the street.

Today's gospel and Pope Francis' new encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* have shown me again the wisdom of these words.

First the Gospel. Jesus is being set up and he knows it. Taxes are always a vexing question and even more so in an occupied territory where they are paid to an oppressor. If Jesus says don't pay them, he would be arrested; if he says pay them, he will seem to be a collaborator. We admire the shrewdness by which he avoids the trap, but isn't it stating a misconception: doesn't everything belong to God?

The answer, of course, is yes, but God expects us to live together and thus encourages institutions which promote security and the equitable distribution of goods. This will vary from age to age, but it is a necessary part of human living, even something as flawed as the Roman Empire.



Pope Francis reminds us of this in the encyclical. Every person and society must seek the common good, but that can be obtained in many ways by many systems of thought. There are many roads to the same end, yet he is very clear that all will require the development and sustenance of strong institutions. These extend from the family through voluntary organizations like churches and local societies to the entire range of civil agencies. This is organized by politics.

Francis is quite aware that politics is for most of us distasteful and acknowledges the corruption and inefficiency of many politicians. Yet he is insistent that, and I quote, politics is “a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good”.

We need to take common good rather literally. There are some people who believe that politics

exists to only to enhance the economy. Indeed, for some a country can be judged by its gross national product alone. This is certainly a part of any successful society, but it must serve the common good. Vast inequalities of income and wealth inevitably weaken a community. If a sizable proportion of the population realizes that no matter how hard they work, they will never really be able to change their situation. While others have few impediments before them it is difficult to develop meaningful patriotism. This is usually compounded with the reality that while some people live like kings, others scrounge in garbage cans for food. Massive inequality has teeth.

Politics for Francis is the art and science through which our neighbor does not find himself in poverty. Sometimes this can be handled by a family, sometimes by a church, but it usually requires a more robust civil component. Francis

writes: “private life cannot exist unless it is protected by public order. A domestic hearth has no real warmth unless it is safeguarded by law”.

This quote continues for a while and it is included with some excerpts from “Fratelli Tutti” on the website. They are well worth reading.

This is all a matter of love and he gives a wonderful example of two kinds of love. He expresses this so well and with such warmth that I will quote it in full:

It is an act of charity to assist someone suffering, but it is also an act of charity, even if we do not know that person, to work to change the social conditions that caused his or her suffering. If someone helps an elderly person cross a river, that is a fine act of charity. The politician, on the other hand, builds a bridge, and that too is an act of charity. While one person can help another by providing something to eat, the politician creates a job for that other person, and thus practices a lofty form of charity that ennobles his or her political activity.

Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (186)

Note how Francis clearly identifies the person who puts this all together as the Politician. He reminds us that the politician will be successful only to the extent that he or she is motivated by love. Francis is in no way naïve in this matter. Indeed, his comments on practical politics are disturbingly realistic. The last paragraph of the selections provided on the web site is particularly poignant and should be read by all of us before we vote this or any year.

Francis sees the politician, admittedly used very broadly, as the person who is responsible for coordinating all the elements which go into a successful country. There will always be the temptation to mechanically apply the principles of one's favorite ideology to the world without thought or love. His holiness is particularly concerned about this as it puts human beings of flesh and blood in the straitjacket of mere thoughts and ideas. A

politician is called to apply his or her whole being to real life. He calls this political love, difficult to obtain and more difficult to maintain. Yet do we pray for them and do we pray that people will take up politics as more than a potentially lucrative career?

My own experience of this is rather personal. During my mother's last illness, we would pray together and I, loyal priest that I am, would always include a prayer for priestly vocations. My mom would add a prayer for vocations to the political life.

This was amazing because she was usually, at best, disrespectful of authority. I think at the end of her long life, a good deal of it spent causing trouble, she knew what was lacking in the society and knew what was needed to build it up: young people willing to participate in the give and take of civil life.

We are all now Caesar, with the power to determine who will act for us. Can we raise up leaders who will show political love and give more back to God than they received from us?

## All Saints – Fr. Smith

November 1, 2020

I wish to congratulate our parishioners who have been reading the Pope Francis' latest encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. It is a deep work and will be well worth reading several times. With something as profound as this I like to have a key, a phrase or an idea which will put the entire work into perspective. I had trouble finding one until I heard a comment by a Franciscan friar who summed it up with "it doesn't have to be like this". This not only helps to interpret *Fratelli Tutti*, but also today's gospel reading and feast.

"Beatitude" is usually translated as "blessing": something which puts us in a good situation.

We would consider a job which allows us to have health insurance a blessing. Having a skill set

which allows us to have an esteemed place in our society, a blessing. Eating nutritious food since childhood, a blessing. We can appreciate all of these, and I hope that we all have them.

Yet, look at what Jesus calls a blessing:

To be poor in spirit means to recognize that there is much that we cannot do ourselves but are dependent on God. Do you want this? Do you consider it a blessing? Or would you find the power and ability to be independent the real blessing?

To be pure in heart as we see in today's psalm means making God the center of your universe and your defender and redeemer. This sounds excruciatingly pious but totally unreasonable. Wouldn't you rather be defended by a first-class litigator?



And how is it a blessing to be persecuted and reviled? Is not being recognized for our talents and abilities the true blessing? Should we not seek the reward of earthly success; would not the esteem of all put us in a good situation?

It is hard not to read these blessings without being conflicted and I think the usual approach, certainly mine for decades, was to write them off as noble ideas which we will find in heaven. But until then we will accept and use more worldly blessings.

Two things changed my mind and heart.

The first was to realize that the Greek word for blessing, “Makarios”, was closer to blissful than what we call blessed. Poverty of Spirit, meekness, mercy, even persecution – if done for Jesus – will bring us bliss, essentially joy. A good job and being held in high esteem are wonderful, but not blissful. It may bring satisfaction – indeed, deep satisfaction

– but not joy. Indeed, a person who believes that these things bring bliss needs, at least, greater self-examination.

The Beatitudes of Jesus bring us the Kingdom of God: true support, mercy and the vision of God – all things the world cannot give. The first change for me – and I think many others as well – was realizing that Jesus really did bring a new life, with new expectations. No matter what else we experience in life, if we do not experience bliss and joy, we have not truly lived.

The second is that this cannot be done alone. It needs a community.

My previous assignment entailed merging two parishes into one. On paper, they looked similar, but needless to say, they were not. The mechanics were fairly straightforward: one bank account, single staff, but allowing some societies to be

duplicated and a simplified Mass schedule. The human aspects were more complicated. How to get people to work together, how to convince them to build a shared community? This was the dilemma which St. Matthew also experienced. He was pastor of a divided community. In his case not from separate buildings, but rather from different world views.

His entire gospel is both a plea and a handbook on unity. His Beatitudes are different from St. Luke's, because despite their seeming unworldliness, they are very practical.

Where there is discord there must be peacemakers. Like Matthew, I needed people who would ease hurt feelings and soothe bruised egos. These truly were in Matthew's words, "Children of God".

There were many talented individuals in the community, but some of them were very aware of their talents and abilities and wanted everyone else to be as well. They were not helpful. Their need for recognition negated their talents. Those who were “poor in Sprit” who realized that their talents were from God and gave them back were important. The kingdom of God could make its way in our parish because of them.

It is amazing how each of these beatitudes is important in community building and how truly blessed we are when we follow them. I was once asked to write a pamphlet on merging churches, and I told the people who asked that it was already done. St. Matthew’s gospel is the best guide, and the Beatitudes form the key section. I did, however, offer an equation: “the more a parish lives the Beatitudes, the more it will be the community that Jesus wants it to be”.

It is therefore very appropriate that the Beatitudes are read for All Saints' Day. Saint means "holy one", and originally referred to all baptized Christians. We were expected to be holy – not just good or successful in the usual sense of the word. The blessings of the world will make for a good neighbor and can run a good NGO, but not build a parish.

Let us look around us. We can say that the Beatitudes of God are hard to accept and thus rare, but how many people have the blessings of the world? Do all have good jobs, secure health care and housing and all the other items that make the good life? Could it be that because so few people have tried to be saints, the world has had no real moral compass and lost its way? When blessings of this world go to fewer and fewer members of it, are any of us really in a good situation?

The longer we are in semi-lockdown, the longer it will take to revive and rebuild. So many of us have gotten out of the habit of Mass, but also our social and educational projects. And let us note that we at St. Charles are in an enviable situation compared to parishes which did not have technologically adept parishioners. We also see a nation that is profoundly befuddled and has seemingly lost the habit of civility. What will be the blessings we will seek? What will bring us to a good place? Our eyes tell us that the blessings of this world are just not good enough, but the Scriptures tell us that there is an alternative. If we desire the blessings of the Scriptures and work to attain them, it will not be this way: it will be God's way.

## **32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time/St. Charles Borromeo - Fr. Smith**

November 9, 2020

Today's Gospel asks, "What are you waiting for?" It is always a good question, but especially pertinent on our patronal feast day and the present situation of our nation and parish.

The parable reflects the marriage customs of 1<sup>st</sup> Century Galilee, which scholars tell us can still be seen in some places in the Middle East today. A marriage was an arrangement between families with two stages. The potential bride was sent to live with the possible groom's family for about a year. If the situation proved satisfactory, the groom would go to the bride's family and conclude the – mostly financial – details. When he returned to his house, they were considered married. This was marked by a great feast – usually, the only one that the couple

he would ever give. The young women of the village would participate by greeting the groom with song, and if he came after dark, with lit torches. This may have been the only party of the year and they would not want to miss it. Yet some of the young women did not calculate properly and lost out of the chance of joining the celebration.

Why did St. Matthew include this in his gospel? He is writing for city people who may have understood the reference but perhaps never experienced it. Matthew as always is seeking to bring people together and he sees in these two groups of villagers a division in his own church. There were those who emphasized that the Kingdom of God was among them., here and now. That is certainly true, but it is also true that it needs to be completed and it can only be fulfilled by Jesus. We are called to live good moral lives, but Matthew is acutely aware of the danger of thinking that by



that we save ourselves. Ultimately, we need Jesus to bring the Kingdom and our lives to complete fulfillment.

Therefore, we watch, but for what?

In Matthew's gospel, oil is a sign of performing good works. In the Sermon of the Mount, Jesus compares good deeds to the light of a lamp which must "Shine before others" (5:16). As he is building up his Church, he knows that waiting for Jesus is not a passive activity but is marked by acts of love and kindness that we saw last week in the Beatitudes. We watch for opportunities to do good.

Our patron, St. Charles Borromeo, knew that as well. He was a 16<sup>th</sup> Century aristocrat, who, as Pope Pius IV's nephew, was entrusted with great power and authority at a very early age. He could have enjoyed the good life in Rome, but instead he became the Archbishop of Milan, the largest

diocese in Italy, and was the first bishop who actually lived there in almost 80 years.

Then he discovered what was waiting for him.

His clergy was indolent and ignorant. He immediately formed seminaries for the education of priests. He also saw the need to educate people in the Faith and developed everything from Sunday Schools for children to fraternities for educated adults. As people do not like to be reformed, especially when they may have to live a more disciplined life, St. Charles received the reward of the true reformer: someone tried to kill him. Ironically, the would-be assassin was a member of a group called “The Brothers of Humility”.

Several years after he arrived in Milan, there was a great famine followed by an outbreak of the plague. The rich, including the governor and his staff, left the city. St. Charles not only stayed, but

also persuaded many clergy to remain with him. He nourished the people in several ways. First, he bankrupted himself by feeding over 60,000 per day. Then he set up altars on the streets and had mass celebrated in the outdoors. You can see this in the stained-glass window behind me:



These activities shamed the governor and other civil leaders to return and begin the reconstruction of the city.

What is waiting for us?

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As a parish under the protection of St. Charles, we should be especially aware of the need to know our faith and care for the poor.

He would be very proud of us that throughout our own time of lockdown we have continued our religious education programs. Most conspicuously, of course, our “Sunday School”<sup>9</sup> which, as St. Charles developed them, is quite fitting, but also our adult faith sharing and book clubs. It is in his spirit that we will be expanding our education ministry this Advent to include bible study. The scriptures interpreted by the tradition of our church is the bedrock on which we live. The reformation of our Parish is waiting for us and as educated people it is

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<sup>9</sup> Maureen Pond directs the Family Faith Program, which offers religious education for children in Pre-K to 8th Grade. There were over 80 students participating in the program this year.

ridiculous to believe that we can rebuild St. Charles in ignorance of the scriptures. It will be the Holy Spirit that will guide and strengthen us but as the young woman waiting for the bridegroom, we must give the Spirit something to work with.

The poor are also waiting for us. The necessity of moving the food pantry once located at Catholic Charities headquarters to St. Charles has proved a great blessing for us. We have over 20 regular volunteers, most of them from our parish.<sup>10</sup> This is wonderful but it only deals with the result not the cause and our young professionals' group is working with several local civic groups to address the root causes of racism and lack of opportunity.

What else is waiting for us?

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<sup>10</sup> The new food pantry location at St. Charles is led by Joseph and Diane Genova.

The recent election campaign has revealed that our country is more divided and bewildered than we may have imagined. But we may better ask, “What *was* waiting for us?” As revealed in his latest encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis has clearly shown that the origins of a lot of our problems would have been revealed and solutions advanced through Catholic Social Teaching. Yet how many of us took advantage of this treasure? Were we not like the unwise in today’s reading? Reasons for and suggestions to address this are found in the weekly email and website.

I do not know what even the immediate future will bring. What awaits us is a mystery, but we who assemble here today can take comfort that through our faith in Jesus we know *who* is waiting for us.

## **1st Sunday of Advent – Msgr. LoPinto**

November 30, 2020

*Paula Mares was baptized at the 11:15 am Mass, viewable at <https://youtu.be/mFTQG9uTULw> .*

We come today to the first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of a new liturgical year.

It had been certainly all of our hopes that when we came to this point, the pandemic would be gone, and we would all be in a much happier mood. But the reality is that, unfortunately, we seem to be in the midst of a second wave. And so, we need to be cautious. We need to be watchful. And so fitting that the words of the scripture today are calling us in that direction to be watchful, to watch.

Perhaps the best way to understand the scripture today is to put it in the context of what we  
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are doing as part of this liturgy. Today, we are baptizing Paula. And as we do that, we reflect on how reality often brings life to the scripture.

You think about it, the mother and father: how they have been watchful, in anticipation of the birth of the child. Every little thing, you know, that first kick, that concern, all of the medical procedures in the sense of checking out all of those things, being very watchful.

And yet the watching isn't over. Perhaps the last word of today's scripture is the most important for the parents and for the godparents and for everyone else with the birth of a child.

*Watch.*

For in a sense, the watching is on both sides.

If you look at Paula right now, she's watching. She's trying to figure out what is she doing here



today in the midst of all of this? Why did she have to get dressed the way they dressed her? Who were these people who were here with her? We're watching and her parents and her godparents are watching as they will be watching all along for those little signs, that first sign of recognition.

And you begin to see that the child is becoming observant. And then watching for those first steps.

These first sounds – and all of it really is a process. But at the same time that you're watching for all of those signs, she's watching. She's watching to learn.

That's part of what I asked you when you came at the very beginning. I said, are you willing to take the responsibility of training her in the practice of the Faith? Because she will be watching. What all of this means, she will be watching you and your actions, your words, your gestures, all of those little

things that we often think are inconsequential, but actually are very important. Because those who are observing are learning. They're learning by watching. And in that process, then, is there growth? Is there development?

So, again, the scripture today is very important in a sense, because it positions Advent. What is Advent really about?

I was out yesterday briefly, and I already saw people carrying their Christmas trees. You know, maybe you've not really done that – I don't want to be, but it's that sense that we can't wait. We have to rush everything. We have to rush everything.

And yet the reality is that Advent is a time of watching. A very critical time of watching. Because Advent reminds us that what we're preparing for is the greatest miracle, the miracle of the Incarnation: God becoming man.

But God says, I didn't do it once. I didn't do it twice. I do it continually. And it is only when you learn to watch, when you learn to watch how God enters into our history on a continual basis, that you begin to understand what's the call of our faith.

What's the challenge of our faith in the midst of a world that often closes its eyes?

Because the beauty of watching is that you have to have your eyes open. Just like Paula has her eyes open right now and is watching every day. And I know getting a little excited there. It's beautiful, right?

But it's watching with eyes open to the world in which we live, that can see how God is coming to us. How God is approaching us. How God is calling us, God is challenging us.

And so Advent has this character to it, a character that is critically important for us people of faith.

Because it says: Watch. Watch. Watch.

Open your eyes and see how God is reaching out to you.

On one side, the blessings. But also watch and see how God is calling and challenging you – the reality of a suffering world in which we live.

And so hopefully when you put the two together, what we learn is that we are the continuation of the great mystery of the Incarnation.

In a sense, we are watching and observing the action, the action of being the hands of God, alive and at work in the world.