

From The Pastor

Today is the day for our parish picnic. Please join us for the fun and fellowship of this parish event. Lunch will be offered, and games will be available for the youngsters. Say a prayer for good weather, and come and enjoy the fresh air with your parish friends. We will have the drawing for the raffle later in the afternoon. It proves to be a very enjoyable time.

I want to encourage you to support the raffle by buying tickets and offering them to family and friends. The raffle helps to defray the cost of the picnic and to support the general fund of the parish. We are hoping to upgrade the sound system in church with any extra monies. Thank you for your support.

As we move into the fall season, and most are home from cottages and summer activities, I am hoping our weekly collections will get a little shot in the arm. Collections are typically down during the summer months, but this year, especially so. We are all aware of the difficult economic times, and I am sensitive to the challenges many are facing. Yet, I would be remiss if I did not encourage you to be faithful to your church giving. The Lord can never be outdone in generosity, and faithful stewardship to the gospel will always gain its reward. Lately, we have been several thousand dollars below our targeted budget. I trust in the coming weeks things will improve.

The Charter School is in the building and school has begun. We are gaining rental income at this point, yet much of it is going right back out to maintain and repair the boilers, and other required upgrades. These rental monies are a help to our budget, once we get past these many early expenses, but should not be an excuse to decrease your parish support. Our viability as a parish is measured against our ability to sustain ourselves through our collections, and not rental incomes. Thank you for your faithful giving in the face of these economic times. God will bless your generosity in service to the gospel.

Plans have been submitted for a two-hour fire rated wall to replace the existing wall between the church and the parish hall. The stewardship commission will meet to discuss the matter and a decision will be made soon. This change is a requirement of the lease agreement demanded by the State if the school is to use the hall. Options are few, so we will do the best we can to resolve this issue in the most effective and appealing way. We will have to adapt to some change that I hope will be satisfying to all parties.

Last week we pondered the courage and the risk that any mature faith is called to have. Acting on that faith becomes the measure of its maturity. Today the theme is strengthened with the challenge of suffering and rejection for the sake of the faith.

Typically heard in the Lenten season, the Suffering servant in the first reading is a person who deeply knows and trusts in the Lord. This minister of God courageously faces rejection and derision for the sake of his call. Clearly, such a person knows the Lord deeply in both prayer and in action.

The reading parallels the gospel in that Jesus is the one who is the one rejected, beaten, and killed for the sake of his faith in God, for our benefit. As Jesus leads, so are we to follow. We are not called to admire Jesus, but to imitate him. In this gospel, Jesus is forming disciples in this call.

Jesus poses the essential question for all followers. ‘Who do you say that I am?’ More than what others say, this is a question we must all answer on our own. Faith is not a group decision. Who do *you* say Jesus is, and in making a decision what does that mean in response? Peter gives the right answer in identifying Jesus as the Messiah, but needs some formation as to what that means for Jesus and for him.

The truth is, any real response to Christ will involve some suffering. To take a stand on the gospel of love and justice, if lived actively, will create some cause for suffering. It is the way of our Savior, and ultimately the way of love. As is said in the second reading today, faith without works is dead. Faith is not a feeling, it is a verb, an action word.

“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny them self, take up their cross and follow me”. You know as well as I that self-denial is not a popular or widely held virtue these days. Yet, the wisdom of the words remain. If we save our lives by self made securities and rhythms that preserve the life we have created to our own liking, we are not likely living the gospel in a vibrant way. “Whoever wishes to save their life will lose it”. How do we lose ourselves? By not being open to the demands and inconveniences of faith and love in service to others. We may have a pleasant life, but it is not rooted in the teaching and example of Jesus.

“Whoever loses their life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it”. We lose our life when we deny ourselves in the service of others in love. When we do this, we know the joy of the gospel, and the courage of our faith. We are alive in Christ, and He in us. We all know this, yet we spend a lot of energy resisting the risk and inconvenience of giving ourselves for others. Lord, give us the courage not only to profess faith, but to put that faith into action with love.

Father John Esper