

From The Pastor

As I write this week on Wednesday, I am mindful that we are two days into our parish mission, with the conclusion this evening. It is only appropriate to give thanks to God for the many, many blessings we have received. Even as we anticipate the grace of Mass this evening, we have already seen the Lord work in powerful and effective ways.

As I heard confessions on Monday evening, it was clear that there was a hopeful longing for healing and newfound peace from the Lord. As we did the monstrance walk on Tuesday and then prayed with people, the Lord touched some of those very same people in rich and freeing ways.

It often takes the special setting of a Mission or retreat time to heighten our longing and awareness for the touch of the Lord. As we open ourselves at such times, the Lord is ready to act on our behalf. Doing new things, or old things in new ways can stir us to perceive and recognize the Lord in ways that we might otherwise miss. The Lord is always present and ready to serve us, yet these special times of prayer and worship seem to bring a special abundance of grace.

I am grateful for the many that came to share in this time of prayer and healing. I believe that the Lord was lifting burdens and giving a new spirit to us as a parish community as a whole. Many others sensed this blessing as well. God cannot be outdone in generosity. We came to worship and give praise to God, and our prayer was heard. God responded with great love, mercy and forgiveness. Sins were forgiven, hearts were lightened, and spirits were lifted. It was clear that God was present and acting.

I want to publicly thank Father Art and Judy Troxell for their prayer, preaching, and ministry on our behalf. It is clear that they believe in what they are doing, even as they anticipate and expect the Lord to honor their work by touching many people. May the Lord continue to bless each of them with joy and strength as they serve in his name. We also thank Mr. Bill Richart for bringing his gift of music and praise. This is a powerful and essential part of this ministry. As the saying goes: 'the Lord inhabits the praises of his people'. Thank you, Bill.

As the Lenten season moves forward, please be mindful that next Sunday is Palm Sunday. Plan to spend Holy Week pondering the mysteries of the love God has for us in Jesus. This is the fullness of our Christian year. Please consider attending the Mass of the Last Supper on Holy Thursday, the Good Friday liturgy, and the Vigil of Holy Saturday. Many people make a habit of not attending these liturgies, I presume, because of their length. These are beautiful and powerful rituals that express the passion of the Lord on our behalf. Though longer, they offer a wonderful opportunity to love and worship the Lord.

The fifth Sunday celebrated today begins to turn the corner toward the Cross. The time of the Lord's suffering draws near and he is preparing both himself and his disciples for the work of our redemption. A prominent theme in John's gospel is that of 'hour'. This 'hour' is the culmination of all that Jesus is, all that he stands for, and all he is to accomplish on the Cross. It is an hour of exaltation and glory. The identity and mission of Jesus is finally revealed. For those who have eyes to see and hearts to believe, the glory of God is revealed in the suffering and death of Jesus for the sake of our redemption.

This is the crisis of the Cross. The Cross is the epitome of contradiction. This instrument of death becomes the altar of the fullness of life. Jesus knows this and wants us to understand. This hour of death is only to serve the hour of new life in greater abundance. We think of death as a losing of life; reluctantly handing our lives over to loss and the unknown.

The image of the grain of wheat teaches a fundamental spiritual truth. Only when the grain breaks open and dies, being buried in the earth does it produce an abundance far beyond itself. Before his death, Jesus is limited in the number of people he can touch. Time and space limit his presence to more people. Beyond death, Jesus becomes available to all. In the fullness of himself as universal Christ and Lord, Jesus is now present to all ages, all people, and all times. For all Jesus was in the flesh, he is now infinitely more to all who seek him. This is the hour of glory and exaltation. All who believe in him will find eternal life.

The death of Jesus is the model of how we are to learn to die. We too must come to an hour of decision and commitment. For us, it is an hour of faith when we surrender ourselves to the demands of love and self-giving that are before us. We might first think of it as an hour of crisis or trouble, one of loss or humiliation. Are these not the times of life when we can realize conversion, self-realization or discovery? Are these not the times when our faith is put to the fire and we are 'on the Cross' so to speak?

In such times, we can cling to ourselves as we know ourselves and not much will change. Or, we could die to our self and discover a new life in God within by dying to what we think we are, for the sake of what is our true self. This is the grain that dies and bears much fruit.

Father John Esper

