

From the Pastor's Desk (personal reflections)

*This week has been for me an incredible time... a time not measured chronologically by minutes, hours, and days, but by another sort of time, one that was designated by the ancient Greeks by the term **καιρός**, "Kairos" which could be translated colloquially as "Miller Time" (for those who remember the commercial) or more appropriately "a moment of tremendous opportunity." I was able to escape the drudgery of the autumnal blues, infested by pre-election vitriol and its amoral character, into a space where I felt alive, filled with the grace of God, embraced by the preferential friendship of Jesus Christ and welcomed by the community of All the Saints. I wanted a lengthier opportunity to share it with you.*

*I began my week with a conversation with my rheumatologist, who is managing my severe gout which is a complication associated with my liver antirejection medications. He had examined me the week before and as a result of that and information gained from testing, he determined the severity of my outbreak of my current flare up and prepared a treatment regimen that brought me great relief, lessening my pain by nearly fifty percent (50%) by the second day of treatment. I COULD NOT HAVE GIVEN GREATER THANKS TO GOD FOR THAT. It was a banner way in which to begin my week. Following that, I had a series of productive days in which I was able to accomplish much in terms of the parish as well as my academic and personal pursuits. I was in affect to en flesh my well-placed hope with joy – something constitutive of the Gospel, as our Holy Father Francis writes to eloquently in **Evangelli Gaudium**, his Apostolic Exhortation at the beginning of his pontificate (Nov. 23, 2013).*

But things could only get better, I had my regular appointment at the liver transplant clinic on Wednesday, and I was to have some genuine and fruitful conversation with my transplant surgeon and transplant coordinator about chronic pain that I have in my back due to three herniated disks that was discovered many years ago, but has not been treated properly due to pre-and post-transplant concerns. As a result of that conversation, we are now exploring some treatment options to address that problem more directly and quite possibly alleviate much of my back pain. Again, this is cause for more than "kudos" to God. Rather, I have been filled with a spirit of gratitude that can only be likened to that I experienced with the gift of new life that God provided to me with my new liver. My friends, never despair of the goodness of God in Christ, "for nothing is impossible with God."

I also experienced something very powerful as I took the time to summarize the message of Pope Francis's Wednesday Audience this past week. Hopefully you read it and you saw that it was about the Sacrament of Confirmation. The pope's words gave me the fortitude to express strong comment to the diocese about the deficiencies of the Confirmation formation program, its understanding of the sacrament itself, and the mass exodus of our youth following its celebration. As of this writing, I have yet to receive a

reply, but I assure you that my words, although strong, were charitable, so I can only hope for a positive and productive response. This is important to me because those being confirmed are the future of our Church (universal and local) and **we do not even know them**. Something has gone awry, and my message is a call to acknowledge the problem and to work to remedy it in a realistic way. I know that the Lord will allow me to be heard.

Things even got better. I had the opportunity to reread the Pope's most recent encyclical, **Delexit Nos**, "He loves us." In it, Francis writes:

"It is only by starting from the heart that our communities will succeed in uniting and reconciling differing minds and wills, so that the Spirit can guide us in unity as brothers and sisters. Reconciliation and peace are also born of the heart. The heart of Christ is "ecstasy", openness, gift and encounter. In that heart, we learn to relate to one another in wholesome and happy ways, and to build up in this world God's kingdom of love and justice. Our hearts, united with the heart of Christ, are capable of working this social miracle." (no.28)

Reflectively praying over this passage, I was able to transcend the vulgar, dehumanizing atmosphere inflicted upon our country by the rhetoric of our current election season. It served as a reinforcement of my belief that that the Kingdom of God is an "already...not yet" reality that can be fulfilled if we once again we center ourselves in Christ. This encyclical, and its message, has recharged me in my ministry to demonstrate to you that **that taking on the heart of Christ is most important...that it is essential if we are to thrive in a world that needs only to be pruned by sharing the eternal message of hope that we have been offered eternal life...we have been saved**, which in turn gives us the strength to be bearers of peace and fierce lovers of others and the entire cosmos.

Finally, and perhaps my greatest gift this week, was the opportunity to return to celebrate the Sunday Eucharist with my family. Oh, have I missed you!! Once again, joy filled my heart as I broke open the WORD and celebrated the sacrament of the source and summit of our Salvation, **the Eucharist**. Although I could not have the opportunity to meet with you one on one by greeting you before or after Mass due to some physical limitations as well as a very low white blood count (around 2) and compromised resistance, I felt a communion with you in praying the prayers, sharing my homily, singing the songs, and gazing upon the very people that the lord has so generously given me to shepherd, filled with the renewed spirit, that I will be able to walk with you even more closely in the days, week, and years to come. Although things have been a bit trying for us as a parish in a few ways, as I have truthfully communicated to you, all of that, while not fading away seemed to adopt its proper place as we became one body and on spirit in Christ at Eucharist. Thank you for that opportunity. I look forward to many more years during our long life together working to build up the Kingdom of God in our part of the local household of God, our beloved Visitation Parish.