

## ***From the Pastor's Desk***

*A few weeks ago, I wrote very clearly and directly, that we would do well not make judgments regarding the nature of the future pontificate without allowing Pope Leo to speak for himself. Well less than two weeks ago, Pope Leo said the search for peace was one of the pillars of his papacy. He insisted that peace isn't just the absence of conflict but a "gift" that requires work, from an end to the production of weapons **to choosing words carefully; "for words too, not only weapons, can wound and even kill."** All of you know how strongly I feel about gossip, theologically and pastorally. These words of Pope Leo reminded me of the words of his predecessor, Pope Francis who, when speaking about the Gospel during his **Angelus Message** for February 16, 2014, reflected upon the text where Jesus explains that he had come "not to abolish but to fulfill the Law" of the Old Covenant. The Pope used the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment, "Thou shall not kill" as an example and goes on to add, "but I say to you: Whoever is angry with his brother will be guilty before the court." "With this, Jesus reminds us that even words can kill," explained the Pope. "When it is said that someone has the 'tongue of a serpent,' what does it mean? That his words kill." "Therefore, not only must one not make an attempt on the life of others, but one must not even pour on him the poison of anger and hit him with slander, nor speak ill of him. And here we arrive at gossip. Gossip can also kill, because it kills the reputation of the person." Pope Francis also indicated that Gossip is verbal terrorism. This is a strong and consistent message on the part of not one but two pontiffs. The message is simple and clear: think before you speak irresponsibly or ill of another, there may be mortal consequences for you both. The GOOD NEWS is that recognizing the evils of gossip, gives us the opportunity for greater spiritual perfection by always attempting to see the good that is present in the other by virtue of the fact that she or he is a creature of God. It gives us the opportunity to creatively view the other in the way God views him or her: with mercy, compassion, dignity and love. It gives us the opportunity to remember that this is the way that God views us because of (not in spite of) our imperfections. It helps us to remember that we are all broken and it is God's desire for us to be made whole. It helps us to work collaboratively with God to bring others to a greater realization of their full human*

*flourishing by speaking only well of them. It helps us to transcend the vestiges of Original Sin and be formed more into the likeness of God in whose image we were made. What a grace! What a blessing! What an opportunity to say “Yes” to God now so that when we stand before God in our transition from time to eternity at death, we can make an unequivocal “Yes” to God for eternity!*

*On a different note, I need to address something that was very distressing to me last Sunday, which has left me disturbed and reflective for several days. Rather than go into a protracted narration of events, I would like to get right to the point. Last Sunday morning, while I was preaching, while making eye contact with various areas in the assembly, I was **greatly** distracted by the fact that in two individual areas within the Church, people were TEXTING. I couldn’t believe it, not only due to the fact that texting was occurring during Mass, while I was speaking, but also that the individuals were regular members of our assembly!! To be quite frank, not only was this act an example of a poor grasp of Mass Etiquette, but also it was personally offensive. I take great pride in the preparation I give to my homilies: They are always done in the spirit of prayer. They are always a consequence of the remarkable training I had in the areas of Scripture, theology, and ethics. They are the fruits of years of pastoral experience. They always contain a part of me. And they speak to my obedience to the Church that requires that as a minister of Word and Sacrament, that I incorporate the Scriptures fully into the Sacred Liturgy which itself is meant to inform and form all of us into a more Eucharistic people. Texting during a homily is worse than ignoring those realities, it cheapens them, which is totally unacceptable. I would never embarrass any one individual for inappropriate “behavior” during Mass; however, I am asking them, I am asking everyone, PLEASE GIVE ME, **GIVE THE CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST, THE RESPECT IT DESERVES BY NOT USING YOUR CELL PHONE AT MASS.** In fact, it is most appropriate that **all cell phones be silenced during the liturgy.** If you are concerned about an emergency, please keep your telephone on vibrate and if you need to make immediate contact with someone because of an emergency, walk to the vestibule or outside of the Church building and address the situation to needs to be addressed.*

*I want to be clear that my anger is addressed to the situation and not to the individuals involved. I hold no hard feelings toward them. We all have been less than prudent in our actions at times, and do not want others to form judgments about us based upon acts in isolation. Therefore, again I want to be clear, I have moved on having been able to articulate my frustrations with the hope that only good can come from it. We are a strong parish, filled with good and faithful people, blessed and broken, ALL OF US. And I love all of you and am very aware of the love that you have for me. We must remember that what challenges us, in faith and in practice, can only make us stronger if we realize that areas for growth are opportunities to realize the love and mercy of Christ our brother present among us.*

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## **SUNDAY JUBILEE PILGRIMAGE SITES AND DATES**

*During the summer, Visitation Parish will continue its Holy Site Pilgrimage "Car Pool." There are three sites that we will be journeying to over the next few months.*

### **June 29<sup>th</sup> – Saint Michael the Archangel Basilica, Loretto, PA. – 7:00 PM**

*(This Mass is a diocesan wide celebration and all parishioners are invited and encouraged to come and celebrate Mass with Bishop Mark Bartchak. The focus of the Eucharistic Celebration is on Mission and the diocese of Mandeville, Jamaica, with which the diocese is twinned will be represented.)*

### **July 27<sup>th</sup> – Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Altoona, PA – 11:00 AM**

*(The Pastor, Fr. Frank Scornaienchi, T.O.R., is my dear friend, and the brother of our own, Rose Turner.)*

### **August 24<sup>th</sup> - Our Lady of Victory State College – 11:00 AM**

*Following the morning Pilgrimage Masses, our group usually goes to a local restaurant for a light brunch. For more information about joining the "car pool," please contact Evelyn Haggerty at (814) 243-2570. Everyone who has been part of the pilgrimage group has had a wonderful experience at each of the different Holy Site Churches that have been visited. Please know you can receive an indulgence for making one of these pilgrimages (granted that the other requisites are fulfilled).*

## ***Priest Retreat***

*From Sunday afternoon through Thursday afternoon, I will be away at Antiochene Village in Bolivar, PA for the Annual Priest Retreat for the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown. I am in a unique position among my brother priests for because of my position as Director of Ongoing Formation of Clergy and Clergy Services, I am “in charge” of this retreat. My job is to be certain all the administrative needs associated with the retreat are met and to provide hospitality to our retreat director, Fr. Thomas Dragga from the Diocese of Cleveland. There was a lot of remote preparation involved with the planning and execution of this retreat, and I am very grateful to my Secretary, Catherine Bennett who did a fantastic job in assisting with the organization of materials and the creation of the worship aid for prayer over these 5 days. Please pray for me and for all of our priests who are making retreat. We too need to have our spiritual selves recharged periodically and this retreat is a “Kairos” moment – the moment of opportunity to do so. Please know that in the event of any emergency, the secretary is able to get in touch with me. Again, I ask for your prayers for this has been a difficult year for me (that is since my liver transplant in July 2024) and I really could use some true spiritual refreshment from our Lord and his most Blessed Mother and all the beloved saints who intercede for me regularly. Know that I will keep all of you in prayer during these coming retreat days.*

*Perhaps you could pray the following prayer for us:*

*Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the gift of our priests.  
Through them, we experience your presence in the sacraments.*

*Help our priests to be strong in their vocation.  
Set their souls on fire with love for your people.*

*Grant them the wisdom, understanding and strength they need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.  
Inspire them with the vision of your kingdom.*

*Give them the words they need to spread the Gospel.  
Allow them to experience joy in their ministry.*

*Help them to become instruments of your divine grace.  
We ask this through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns as our eternal priest. Amen.*