

From the Pastor's Desk

I am happy to report that my surgery went very well, but not without some complications. I had to remain in the hospital for two days following the surgery for precautionary measures. First, the herniated masses in the abdomen area were much larger than were anticipated by the surgeon and we had to adopt a pain management schedule that will allow for appropriate healing. Second, any time that I would require surgery they have concerns about my lowered resistance because of the anti-rejection medication that I take. In particular, they wanted to be certain that I would not be susceptible to pneumonia given that I had just recovered from it two weeks prior to the event. Again, I am happy to report that upon discharge I had no signs of pneumonia and that while I am in quite a bit of pain, the medication schedule is more than adequate for making my recovery tolerable. As I reported last weekend, I will be recuperating for at least the next seven to ten days. I am very grateful to Fr. Code for celebrating with you this past weekend. He is a good friend and a very fine priest, and I always feel very comfortable having him stand in for me when necessary. In any case, thank you for all your prayers and I am hopefully looking forward to being with you again next weekend. I miss when I am unable to celebrate the finest day of the week with you, and I always remember all of you when I celebrate Eucharist privately.

I wanted to offer a gentle reminder in light of some "liturgical amnesia" that I have noticed over the last several weeks. We need to become very self-aware of the appropriate liturgical posture at the end of the offering of the gifts as we anticipate the prayers over the offering. Remember, the assembly is to remain seated as I say: "Pray brothers and sisters (or pray friends) that this our sacrifice might be acceptable to God our Almighty Father." After that INTRODUCTION has been offered, the assembly stands and responds in prayer: May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands, for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church." I remind you of what you already know: first, this is the practice of the universal Church (regardless of some parishes adopt NOT to do so) and second, it is important liturgically that we distinguish the prayer from the introduction by standing (which has been the appropriate posture for prayer in the Roman Church for almost two Millenia). I realize you have generally been so good with this movement and that we are nearly perfect in this regard and ask you to forgive me for being distracted from time to time by the wave that marks a lack of uniformity in practice. Thank you for being such a faithful presence at liturgy where we meet our God who has come to be one with us in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

On that note, I want to remind you of just how important that we continue to be a parish family marked by a dynamism that is uniquely our own. I am certain that all of you are aware of our demographic, we are a “mature” parish in terms of our general membership, filled with the wisdom and grace of many years. At the same time, we constantly commit ourselves to new events, ideas, and activities. We have been very successful in our participation in the Jubilee Year (e.g. the Jubilee pilgrim group, our engagement in Jubilee works of mercy {soup kitchen/saint Vincent de Paul volunteering}), our acts of Jubilee charity (collections for St. Vincent de Paul and the Women’s Health Center), participation in diocesan Jubilee events (the Altoona Cathedral Opening Liturgy, the Cathedral Concert, the Mass at Loretto for the Solemnity of Peter and Paul, not to mention several other events to come). Our parish picnic (with 96 members attending) was a tremendous success (as all our parish social gatherings this year have been – with record numbers in attendance since COVID). I was also so pleased with our Day of Eucharistic Adoration on JUNE 22nd with more than 80 persons making a visit with the Blessed Sacrament that day. On that note, I am pleased that many of our regular adoration days have attendance in the double digits inspiring me to schedule a traditional 40-hour celebration later this year. We continue to have very successful fundraising activities (the annual basket party and fish fry) with renewed hope for participation in the Ethnic Fest on the horizon. These not only support us financially, but of equal importance, they are opportunities for building community. We have and are continuing to implement security protocols to keep our worship space safe and to attend to any emergency. And there are several other items and events on the horizon. All in all, I want to assure all that Visitation parish is alive and well, and contrary to the thought of some we are not merely surviving, WE ARE THRIVING as a vibrant community of faith in our own unique way.

Unfortunately, as is the case in the rest of society, Visitation parish has taken an economic hit. Inflation does not spare us because of our mission. Costs have risen across the board and although we hold to a very tight budget, we find ourselves at times tightening our belt almost to extremes. You know that I rarely talk about money, and I hate to do so; however, being fiscally responsible requires me to do so at this time as we have begun a new fiscal year. To be direct, we require approximately an average of \$4400 per week to support our mission. This includes but is not limited to some of the aforementioned ministries, the upkeep of buildings and grounds, utilities, salaries, insurances, diocesan assessments (required of all parishes), parish office and church supplies, provisions for the rectory, and other expenses that would be undertaken by most households. Since COVID, even with the rental of the school

building and parish, we often fall just short of that amount. Therefore, I am asking at this time, given the gifts with which God has blessed you, as well as your personal responsibilities to home and family, that you consider making a modest increase in your charitable giving to the parish in light of the fact that our dollars do not stretch as far as they did even a few years ago. Know that no increase is too small. Also know that I would never ask you to do something that I would not do myself. As of January, I looked at my personal budget and prayerfully decided to make a double digit increase in my charitable giving. The only reason that I share that information with you is to let you know that I feel that it is my duty to be a good steward to my parish because I am a faithful member as are you. If you could only afford an increase of 2, 3 or 5% I would be most grateful. If you go before the Lord and do not feel that you are able to increase your giving at this time I fully understand and respect that as well. My only request is that you pray for our continued success in meeting our budgetary needs. Also, I want to be certain that ALL parishioners know that if they find themselves in a temporary state of financial need, I will do my best to assure you some form of assistance. Again, to be frank, times are tough universally and we need to support one another as best we can.

Please continue to join with me in prayer every day to the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of Our Lady of the Visitation, our parish patron that she will bring our needs before the Father who gave her life, the Son she bore to save us, and the Spirit that sustained her in grace. Mary knew what it meant to part of an active and alive family of faith, celebrating her Jewish life and traditions with Jesus and Joseph as witnessed by the Scriptures. She also would have known how to live on a restricted budget to make ends meet since the Scriptures also tell us that Joseph her husband was a “tekton,” a handyman who would have “picked up” carpentry and masonry work to support his family. She also knew the difficulties of traveling though life as the title of her patronage to us implies. She will be one with us if we trust in her intercession and even more in her son, who came to bring us life and bring it abundantly.

*One final note for this week’s reflection. I want us to remember that when we reflect upon our identity as a parish family, our dynamic ever evolving nature, our financial status, our community orientation; our celebration of Sunday Eucharist must be the most important thing that defines us. First, we must remember that before the Eucharist becomes something that we do (we “go to Mass”) it is something that Christ does for us. In his document on the liturgy, **Desiderio Desideravi**, Pope Francis puts it this way:*

Before our response to his invitation-well before-there is his desire for us. We may not even be aware of it, but every time we go to Mass, the first reason is that we are drawn there by his desire for us. For our part, the possible response-which is also the most demanding asceticism-is, as always, that surrender to this love, that letting ourselves be drawn by him. Indeed, every reception of communion of the Body and Blood of Christ was already desired by him in the Last Supper. (DD, 6)

Accordingly, we can never forget the tremendous privilege we have in coming together as a community of faith to respond to God's desire for us in Christ in love.

*Secondly, and correspondingly, we must be fully conscious in our response of thanksgiving to God's desire. The American Catholic Bishops address this response very well in their document, **The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church**, as follows:*

The Second Vatican Council taught that, in order to give thanks properly in the celebration of the Mass, we should "take a full, conscious, and active part in the liturgical celebration." We need to be conscious of the gift that we have received, a gift that is none other than the Lord himself in his act of self-giving. We become conscious of this gift when we actively engage our minds, hearts, and bodies to every part of the liturgy, allowing God through the words, gestures, actions, and even the moments of silence to speak to us. We actively and consciously participate by giving our full attention to the words being spoken in the prayers and the Scriptures, even if we have heard them a hundred times before. We do so by listening to the homily and reflecting upon how the Lord may be speaking to us through his ordained minister. We are actively giving thanks when we join in singing and in the responses; when we kneel, stand, and sit; and when we pay attention to the liturgical seasons where the entire history of what God has done for us, in and through His Son is revealed to us. (ME, 31)

Of all that I have reflected up this week, this is the most important. We are people of the Eucharist, for the Eucharist, and in the Eucharist. If the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday, our active participation in it, it NOT the most important part of our week, then we must today radically reorient our priorities, for it is our Eucharistic Lord that saves us over and above anything that we give to or do for our Church. Our giving and doing remains important; however, for it is an outward sign of our most interior commitment to the crucified and risen One who feeds us with his Body and Blood.

