

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

*This past week, yet again the Lord blessed me with another successful medical procedure yielding good results. On Monday, I had a regularly scheduled colonoscopy which revealed that I am cancer free. As always, I was very grateful to God for his ongoing goodness to me. My kidneys unfortunately continue to be an issue for me because of the anti-rejection medication that I am required to take for the rest of my life because of my liver transplant; however, I will have more information on that in coming weeks. For now, I continue to thank God for every small victory that I have on medical fronts.*

*I wanted to take a moment to reflect upon the religious significance of the secular holiday that we will all be celebrating this week, namely Thanksgiving Day. The history of Thanksgiving is rather interesting and reaches back to colonial times, when colonial leaders called for days of thanks. By the 19th century, Thursday became a common choice for those days. The New England colonists were accustomed to regularly celebrating "Thanksgivings," days of prayer thanking God for blessings such as military victory or the end of a drought. The U.S. Continental Congress proclaimed a national Thanksgiving upon the enactment of the Constitution, for example. Yet, after 1798, the new U.S. Congress left Thanksgiving declarations to the states; some objected to the national government's involvement in a religious observance, Southerners were slow to adopt a New England custom, and others took offense at the day's being used to hold partisan speeches and parades. A national Thanksgiving Day seemed more like a lightning rod for controversy than a unifying force. Thanksgiving Day did not become an official national holiday until Northerners dominated the federal government. President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a national Thanksgiving Day in 1863 and set it for the last Thursday in November. In 1941, the U.S. government set a law establishing Thanksgiving as the fourth Thursday in November.*

*The meaning of Thanksgiving today encompasses gratitude, family, and togetherness. It is a time for reflection on blessings and appreciation for loved ones. Additionally, it serves as a moment to acknowledge and heal national wounds, emphasizing the importance of unity and faith.*

*Overall, Thanksgiving has evolved into a celebration of community and gratitude, marked by traditional feasting and gatherings.*

*Unfortunately, at times, the emphasis has been upon the feasting and gatherings (often revolving around sporting events such as the “true” national pastime: football). And while these customs are not unimportant, we cannot fail to realize that the primary reason for our giving thanks is for the many blessing that our God has given to us. First among the things that we should be giving thanks for is that our God chose us to be recipients of his mercy through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ His Son. **EVERYTHING ELSE IS SECONDARY TO THAT. EVERYTHING.** Second, and of parallel importance to that, is that God allows us to commemorate and remember this tremendous gift to us through our weekly celebration of Sunday Eucharist. As you know, the term “Eucharist” comes from the Greek, **εὐχαριστία**, or **eucharistia**, which means “thanksgiving or thankfulness.” Everything else follows after this: our thankfulness for family, friends, health, economic stability, etc. As Catholics, it is extremely important for us to remember this reality, especially on Thanksgiving Day. This is why it is extremely important for us to prayerfully consider beginning our day with the celebration of Mass here at the parish at 9:00 AM. Now I have heard people, say, “I have so much to do, I couldn’t possibly think about coming to Mass.” Well, I would just like to share with you, that I have prepared a family Thanksgiving for at least 8 of the 10 last Thanksgivings, and I will be preparing a meal this year as well, and I personally would not have the resolve to enter into the true religious spirit of the day if I did not begin with the celebration of Eucharist. So I am asking all parishioners: Even though there is no obligation to come to Mass this Thanksgiving, prayerfully consider coming to celebrate with your greater family, the family of the Church, to show your most sincere gratitude to God for the multiple blessings that he has bestowed upon you, especially the blessing of your salvation and the possibility of eternal life with God and those who you love and have loved here and now.*



**Please note:** The parish offices will be closed on both Thursday, November 27<sup>th</sup> (Thanksgiving Day) and Friday, November 28<sup>th</sup>.

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**Bishop's Visitation – Saturday, November 29<sup>th</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent.** I want to remind all parishioners that Bishop Mark Bartchak will be making a pastoral visit to Visitation Parish on Saturday, November 29<sup>th</sup>. Bishop Mark will celebrate the 4:00 PM Mass and will gather with our parish family for a buffet dinner reception following the liturgy. This is the official visitation of the bishop to our parish that is supposed to take place every five years according to Church law. Bishop Mark, as well as all the bishops of the United States have been unable to keep that commitment due to the Covid-19 Pandemic that caused such great devastation to our nation. It has been almost 8 years since Bishop Mark has visited our Parish, and I for one am awaiting his visitation with eager expectation.

I want to remind you how important it is for the bishop to visit his individual parish communities. As bishop, he serves as our spiritual father. He is in no way coming to check up on us (in fact, I initiated the invitation). Rather, bishop is coming to show his solidarity with us, the faith community that he has entrusted to my temporal and spiritual care. As I have often stated, I have an excellent relationship with Bishop Mark and I would like the same to be true of our entire parish community. I hope in our gathering that follows the liturgy, as many of you as possible with be able to engage him in conversation is a spirit of mutual respect. Bishop does truly care about all of us, and I hope you will be able to experience that this coming Saturday. Therefore, I am asking as many of you as possible to come to Mass on the evening of Saturday, November 29<sup>th</sup> and attend the reception which follows. This may mean coming to a different Mass; however, I remind you that this is for one weekend only. I promise you that the liturgy will be beautiful and that the reception will be a **five-star** event much as we have become accustomed to. If you did not have the opportunity to sign up in the main vestibule of the Church this weekend, please call the rectory by the end of business day on Wednesday to indicate your intention to join us for the celebration.

## **Advent Prayer Partners**

*This will be our fourth year to engage in our Advent Prayer Partner Project. To participate, all that you need to do is place your name on one of the slips found in the main vestibule of the Church and place it in the container that is also found there. You will be matched with a prayer partner for whom you will be asked to pray throughout the season of Advent. This spiritual exercise helps us to both engage in something extra in this season of eager expectation and to build community among the members of our parish community. If you were unable to place your name in the contain this weekend, you can always call the rectory to be added to the list.*

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## **United States Conference of Catholic Bishops**

*The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) gathered for their Fall Plenary Assembly in Baltimore, November 11-13. Among the many things that the bishops discussed and voted on was a revision of the **Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services**. The revisions address the statement issued by the USCCB's Committee on Doctrine in 2023 ("doctrinal note") that underscored the role that those involved in the ministry of Catholic health care services have in providing the best medical care, as well as Christ's compassionate accompaniment to all patients, no matter who they may be, or from what condition they may be suffering. The bishops also clarified their teaching on the prohibition of surgical or chemical interventions seeking to exchange or simulate the sex characteristics of a patient's body for those of the opposite sex, building upon "**Dignitas Infinita**," the 2024 declaration on human dignity published by the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, which recounts the biblical and magisterial basis for the Catholic Church's understanding of human dignity as inherent, since it ultimately flows from the human person's creation "in the image and likeness of God" and redemption in Christ. The bishops voted 206 in favor, 8 votes against, and 7 abstentions to pass the revisions to the document.*