

Sunday, December 25, 2022

Christmas, Year A

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



Merry Christmas! Glory to God in the highest, and peace to people of goodwill!

As we celebrate the birth of the Savior into our world, may his light and life flood our hearts, our homes, and our world. God did not choose to abandon us when we were lost, but became a vulnerable child in order to lead us to truth and freedom. May the blessing of God, through the prayers of the Holy Family rest on you, and may the joy of Christmas be with us now and always!

Thank you to everyone who dedicated their time and talent to making our Christmas celebrations beautiful and joyful, from our dedicated and talented musicians and singers, to our church decorators, and all those in liturgical ministries, thank you!

Also thank you to our staff here at the pastorate who have put in a lot of work getting ready for Christmas and the end of the year. None of this would be possible without their sacrifices!

Finally, thank you to all our parishioners. Your work, your generosity, and your prayers. I have been given an incredible gift to be your pastor these six months, and it is a special joy to celebrate this Christmas with you.

If this is your first time with us at the Pastorate, or it's been a while since you've been here, we are glad you have joined us! Know that you are always welcome!

Remember that next weekend (Dec 31st-January 1st) is the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God, and also our Mass schedule shifts.

Saturday December 31st

4pm Sherrill

6pm Holy Cross

Sunday January 1st

8am Luxemburg

10am Balltown

God Bless, Fr. Tyler

Sunday, December 18, 2022

Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year A

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



Welcome to the last week of Advent! This weekend we finally have a Gospel reading preparing for the birth of Jesus! Joseph receives a message from an angel to take Mary into his home because the child she is with is given to her by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph, being a good, righteous, holy man, wakes up and responds to the command of the Lord. May we imitate the righteousness of St Joseph, listen for God's word, and do what we have been commanded.

Next weekend we celebrate the birth of the Savior! This may be a time when many return to Church to celebrate the joy of Christmas, and it is a good opportunity for us to show welcome and hospitality to others. The little things might make a big difference for someone who doesn't regularly come to Mass. Say hello to a stranger, make room in the pew, help them find a page in the missalette, hold open a door, and especially welcome families with kids! It can be daunting for a family, especially with young ones who may get squirmy, but we want them to know and feel they are welcomed and loved. If the Church isn't crying, it's dying!

Also, consider this may be a good time to invite someone you know who hasn't been around in a while, to return and share our Joy! Usually we just get out of the habit, so an invitation is often welcome.

If I don't see you next weekend, have a very blessed Christmas!

Christmas Masses are:

Christmas Eve (Saturday Dec 24th)

4pm in Rickardsville (with Fr. Jim Bergen SVD)

4pm in Sherrill

6pm in Balltown

Christmas Day (Sunday Dec 25th)

8am Holy Cross

10am Luxemburg

Fr. Tyler

Sunday, December 11, 2022
Third Sunday of Advent, Year A

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



I never really appreciated just how green everything is in Iowa (at least during the summer) until I visited a friend in El Paso Texas. El Paso is in the Chihuahuan Desert, which stretches from northern Mexico, into west Texas, and even southern New Mexico, so a big place. There's not much water there, so most places don't have lawns, but "rock-scapes". The desert can receive 6-20 inches of rain a year, and usually all at once in the monsoon season in the summer. But that does not mean it is dead. There are succulents and cactus that thrive there, bats and birds and reptiles, and even the bushes that look like dried up twigs can burst into life once the rain comes.

As we continue through Advent, there may be places in our lives that feel dead, dried up, beyond hope. But God's grace, the coming of Jesus, is like a promise of rain that will produce fruit and life even in places that seem lost or gone. That is why this weekend we celebrate Gaudete Sunday, Rejoice! Because the time of new life, when the deaf will hear, the mute speak, and the lame walk is coming!

What are places in our lives that we feel are dry or even dead? If we look, can we notice signs of new and unexpected life? It is exactly there that the power of the Lord will come, we only need to wait with patient and expectant Hope!

Fr. Tyler

Sunday, December 4, 2022
Second Sunday of Advent, Year A

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



This weekend we hear of the wild man who calls to repentance, living in the wilderness on bugs and honey, wearing only camels' hair for clothing, and points to another one coming after him. John the Baptist is a fascinating figure in salvation history, the last of the prophets before Jesus the Christ comes to fulfill all prophecy. He's well known for his call "Repent!" which drives us to turn away from sin. But it is also more than that. Repent comes from the Greek word "meta-noia" which can also mean "beyond the mind" or to change one's mind. It's not only a call to stop breaking the law, but to prepare for something radically new, that is beyond what we may be able to understand or cannot expect. Are we open for what the Lord has in store for us?

Help Wanted! As parishes we need leadership that can help look and see where the Lord is leading, what are the areas of grace that Christ is drawing us to, or what are the areas of weakness that we must work to strengthen. This is a task for all parishioners, but also a few who may feel called to do that in a formal way. We are restarting the Pastorate Council for our five parishes as soon as possible, we just need volunteers to step up and offer to give some of their time and experiences to pray and discern the direction of the Pastorate with others. This is especially necessary because in January we will begin the next phase of the Synod and examine Parish Vitality as it applies to our parishes.

If you are interested in being a part of this important group, please send me an email (t.raymond@dbqarch.org) or give me a call at the office. Do you have ideas, a perspective, or just a desire to help guide the future of the Pastorate? This may be God calling YOU!

Fr. Tyler

Sunday, November 27, 2022
First Sunday of Advent, Year A

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



I have a sweatshirt that was given to me, you may have seen it, black with a skull on the front and the words “memento mori” on the back. I like it because sometimes people do a double take when they see a priest wearing a skull sweatshirt. It’s not an ode to metal music or meant to be morbid, it’s a deeply Christian symbol. You might often see statues of St Francis with a skull next to him. Memento mori means “remember you must die”, for the Christian this does not mean that one day it all ends, but that one day we will stand before our savior and our judge Jesus Christ, and render an account of our lives to him. We can live everyday like there is certainly another tomorrow, always putting off what we know we need to do or need to change, but we never know the day or the hour. Instead, remembering that we will have to face God, who is both merciful and just, and tell him how we used what he gave us, for good or for evil, helps to give us perspective on the day, the moment, every hour of our lives. It is not a sadness, but a potential for greater joy now, living for God, awake, alive, and on fire!

Remember, take advantage of the sacrament of confession this Advent!

Your pastor,
Fr. Tyler

Sunday, November 20, 2022
Christ the King, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



Happy Solemnity of Christ the King! This is the last Sunday of Ordinary time, so next Sunday we celebrate the first Sunday of Advent! Advent, which means “Coming”. We look forward and backward in the season of Advent. We remember that God, Jesus Christ, came into the world, into history, was born over 2000 years ago. We reflect on the preparation God did with his people Israel for that moment, as they waited for the Messiah to come and free them. Advent is our preparation to celebrate that beautiful night of Christmas. But we also look forward to that day when Christ will come again, not as a baby in a manger, but in power and glory, to win the final battle over evil, and establish his eternal kingdom.

Advent is a season of hopeful preparedness. We should take up some extra spiritual practice during this season to help us to receive Jesus anew during the Christmas Season. Number one should be coming to the sacrament of Confession, nothing prepares us better for the coming of the righteous one than a soul free from sin. But this could also be a good season to keep a journal, where are we day to day? Maybe some kind of penance, like saying no to sweets or watching less TV to take time for silence. Be sure to light your Advent wreath at home!

Have a Happy Thanksgiving. Come Lord Jesus!

Your pastor,
Fr. Tyler

Sunday, November 13, 2022

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



Next weekend (Thursday-Sunday) I'll be with most of the Beckman Juniors on the retreat Kairos. Kairos is led by senior students and some school faculty/staff, and is an incredible opportunity for juniors to get away, rest, and open themselves up to a deeper encounter with Christ. Everyone who goes has a profound experience and encounter with Jesus. Kairos is a Greek word that means Time, but it is not like "clock" time (that's another word, kronos). It's more like Timing, planned Time, the Time of the Lord, the moment of God's action and presence.

As much as we believe that God is present everywhere and in all things, we can easily be distracted, and have a hard time seeing or knowing God's presence. Retreats are not just for youth, they are essential for all Christians to take a step back, re-examine life, and give God time so that we can truly see him. Keep your eyes open for retreats like CEW or Marriage Encounter, or maybe take a day to go to New Mellary Abbey for quiet reflection. When was the last time you left the daily grind, Chronos, for God's moment, Kairos? Next weekend we celebrate Christ the King, who is Lord of all Time and Space, king of the universe!

Please keep our retreat in your prayers!

Your pastor,
Fr. Tyler

Sunday, November 6, 2022

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



Tuesday is voting day! We have a responsibility as Catholics to help direct the good of our communities and nation by voting. Although the Church will not endorse candidates, or necessarily even policies, we do use the teaching of the Church to help guide our decisions about what is good for the human person and for the common good of all. The Church does not have a "teaching" on tax policy, but she does teach that private property is a natural good for the responsible care of resources, to enable the needs of everyone to be met efficiently and justly. She teaches that Life from conception to natural death is sacred, and that we have a responsibility to provide out of our excess for those who do not have the basic necessities of life.

The Church gives us principles to help to form our consciences, so that when we vote or participate in public life, we have well-formed consciences to make the best decisions we can. One great resource is iowacatholicconference.org which helps to inform Catholics on issues and teachings that can help make the best choice possible in the ballot box. Pray for all politicians and public servants, that they may work for peace, justice, and the common good of all.

Your pastor,
Fr. Tyler

Sunday, October 30, 2022

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



Recently I received some of the results of our synod survey done for all the parishes, based on responses of parishioners. There were two results that stood out. Remember, the synod survey was largely gathering information about what makes a vibrant parish.

The first mark of vibrancy that our parishes said was weekly Sunday Mass. That is GOOD NEWS. Sunday Mass is the source and summit of our lives, and without it our faith quickly withers and dies, no matter what else might be going on. To recognize that Sunday Mass is the most appreciated mark of vibrancy is a very good sign.

The second mark of vibrancy for our parishes was community, another very good sign. The Church is a body, a family, one that is built of people, and grows stronger as we come together.

Both of these marks that the Pastorate said were important also should call us to ask, how can we improve, even what we think is going well. Community and Mass are two things we can and should be striving for more, and better! Recognizing these two very important things, I would ask everyone to think about how we can grow. Having recognized these areas, where is God asking us to follow Him in these areas? Have we asked Him? To be synodal means listening, not just in surveys, but also listening to the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church, and guides our parishes when we let Him and listen to Him! Where is the Spirit blowing? He is trying to speak through you!

Your pastor,
Fr. Tyler

Sunday, October 23, 2022

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



Next weekend we will celebrate the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick during the weekend Masses. This sacrament was once known as “Last Rites” or “Extreme Unction” because it had been restricted to those about to die, but it was restored to its proper place as anointing for those who are ill, which comes from scripture, when Jesus sends out his disciples to anoint and cure the sick (Luke 9:1-6) and in James 5:14-15. Anointing is for those who are seriously ill, those with chronic illness, or those who are burdened by age. Anytime someone is undergoing serious surgery they can be anointed as well. If one is dying, they can receive special prayers which includes preparation for the soul on its final journey to the Father. Anointing offers forgiveness of venial sins, strengthening of the spirit to endure suffering for the sake of Christ, and potentially healing in mind and body as well.

Also, November 1st is the Solemnity of All Saints, where we celebrate all the Saints in Heaven, even those who are not named or known. A saint is anyone who is in Heaven, so we should all strive to be saints, and we do not know how many saints are in Heaven! It is also a holy day of obligation (a Catholic must attend Mass unless a serious reason prevents them). We will have Mass at 8am in Balltown, 10am in Holy Cross (with the school), and 7pm in Rickardsville. All Souls, where we pray for those in Purgatory who are on their way to Heaven but not yet perfect, is on Nov 2nd, and there will be Mass at Luxemburg at 8am, and Sherril at (about) 7:15pm (with faith formation).

I always like this time of year. Halloween, which comes from All Hallows Eve (the evening before All saints (like hallowed or holy), is a night of spookiness which gives way to the victory of the Saints in Jesus, death is banished by the Resurrection! May everyone have a safe Halloween, I'll be watching some scary movies! But always remember that Christ has won over death, and so we await, hope, and pray for Eternal Life!

Your pastor, Fr. Tyler

Sunday, October 16, 2022

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



One of the corporal works of mercy, the ways we cooperate with Christ's Grace to do good things for others physically, is to bury the dead. In the Catholic tradition that has meant funeral rites for the deceased and care of cemeteries. We also keep cemeteries because we believe that one day our bodies will rise in the resurrection of the dead, and so we believe it is important to treat the body after death with respect and looking forward to life everlasting (also why we don't spread or keep ashes, but bury them).

Our cemeteries require care and upkeep and have expenses. Thank you to all those who maintain them and help with this corporal work of mercy, especially our trustees (we are looking for one more in Sherrill, so let me know if you are interested!). We have not updated the cost of graves for several years and so have fallen behind our neighbors as our expenses continue to grow.

The trustees and myself have decided to raise the price of grave easements to help our care of this important ministry. On November 1, the price of plots will be \$400 for a parishioner, and \$800 for a non-parishioner. This brings us in line with other local cemeteries and helps to provide for their care and future. Plots can be purchased through the trustees. If you have questions, please reach out to us and we will gladly assist you. Continue to pray for the dead and may we all have deeper faith in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting!

Your pastor,
Fr. Tyler

Sunday, October 9, 2022

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



October marked some very important feasts day for the Church, including St. Therese (1st), Guardian Angels (2nd), Francis of Assisi (4th), Faustina (5th), and Our Lady of the Rosary (7th). And there are some upcoming ones as well. Saint Luke is on the 18th, Gospel writer and patron of doctors and artists. I normally don't eat breakfast, but on Tuesday when we had Mass at St. Francis for St. Francis, I felt obligated to have a desert after Mass (which was really good)!

Sometimes I think that we can be pretty poor "feasters" in our culture. As Catholics, we know the importance of fasting, and build it into the seasons of Lent and Advent to prepare for Easter and Christmas, but feasting is just as important as fasting. We are obligated to come to Mass on Sunday in order to celebrate, to feast on the Word and on the Eucharist because Jesus is risen from the dead! We have many more days of feasting than fasting in the Church, and our faith is not a burden but a joy, a reason to celebrate! Sometimes we have to be reminded to party!

Some good times to celebrate include the day of your baptism, when you were born to eternal life, or the day of a patron saint. If you're a doctor or artist, St. Luke's day is a perfect time to have something sweet! Or look up what patron saints might be important to you (like St. Isidore patron of farmers on May 15th). Put dates of faith celebration on the calendar and do a little extra to mark those important occasions in life to remember that God's grace isn't just at Church, but flows into our calendars too!

Your pastor,
Fr. Tyler

Sunday, October 2, 2022

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



Happy Fall! Feels like the weather changed right as the season started. Fall is my second favorite season, with cool nights that are great for campfires, great food like squash and pumpkin pie, and my favorite movies (I'm a big scary movie fan). There's a great deal of natural beauty and a lot of work being done in the fields for harvest. Say an extra prayer for our farmers, especially for their safety! I was never a farmer, nor anyone in my immediate family. I remember my parents telling me I needed to get a job when I was fourteen and I could choose between corn de-tasseling and working at Hy-Vee...didn't make as much money as some of my friends that summer, but I enjoyed the AC!

My first year as a priest I got made fun of by a farmer (now friend) who couldn't believe I had never plucked a chicken and didn't think I would do it. I took him up on his offer to help the next morning. I don't know if I was helpful, and I still remember the smell, but it was an experience. Since then, I've also gotten to ride in a tractor during harvest and butcher a hog, but I've yet to milk a cow or fix a pig! Thank you to all those who work in the fields and support them.

St. Isidore, patron of Farmers, pray for us!

Fr. Tyler

Sunday, September 25th, 2022

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



It's been a big week in the pastorate, as we officially kick off our Faith Formation year. A special thank you to Ali Brehm, our new Faith Formation coordinator for accepting the position and working hard to get the year going. And another thank you to all the catechists (teachers) who have stepped up to help pass on the faith to our youth. I myself went to faith formation growing up and I remember particular teachers who left an impression on me. I also taught faith formation classes as part of seminary, and I know it can be a lot of work! But it is a noble ministry, to pass on the truths of our faith to the next generation. In fact, it is a ministry that in some way we are all called to. Every Christian by our baptism is sent to preach the Good News to the world, but especially parents. At a child's baptism, parents promise to raise their children in the faith, teaching them to love God and Neighbor by their words and example. God bless our faith formation program, our teachers, our students, and our families!

Next weekend we will have our change in Masses in the Pastorate. 4pm Rickardsville, 6pm Balltown, 8am Holy Cross, 10am Luxemburg. We will continue to have Confessions available 30 minutes before the weekend Masses.

October starts two important times for the Church. First it is the month of the Rosary. The Rosary is a beautiful prayer that helps us to reflect on the mysteries of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Pray the Rosary!

Secondly, it is also Protect Life Month. We thank God that the Supreme Court returned regulation of abortion to the states, there is still much work to do to protect life from conception until death, including continuing to work for laws that protect life at all stages, and help those who may otherwise seek out bad choices in poor situations. October 2nd and 3rd after Mass there is an opportunity to support Dubuque County Right to Life and their work. May our nation and our world respect the dignity of all human life.

Your pastor,
Fr. Tyler

Sunday, September 18th, 2022

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



This week I was in Des Moines for a gathering of the newly ordained priests of Iowa, those ordained in the last 5 years. It was a great opportunity to be with brother priests, something that usually takes a lot of effort because we are spread out and spread thin. We studied the Church's law (Canon law), which governs things like rights and responsibilities of pastors, what is legal or illegal in investing Church funds, and marriages. Lots of good information and reminders. But spending time with brother priests is precious, not only are they fun to spend time with (we've got a good group) but we keep each other grounded, humble, and inspired. One day the priests of Dubuque went axe throwing, and I got ok at it!

We pray for vocations at weekend Masses in the petitions and we should, we especially need more priests, and I will say it is a fulfilling and joyful life! Can you name the last priest to be ordained from our parishes? God is calling someone, several "someones" to be priests of Jesus Christ, to join this brotherhood. Does anyone come to your mind who you think would make a good priest? Have you told them, encouraged them, and prayed for them? May God raise up many vocations from our Pastorate!

Your pastor,
Fr. Tyler

Sunday, September 11th, 2022

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



This weekend we start having regularly scheduled opportunities for the Sacrament of Confession. The Sacrament of Confession requires that we confess all our serious sins that we know, have sorrow for our sins, and intend not to sin again. Serious sins are described as "mortal" because they rupture our life of grace, these include knowingly and willingly breaking the Ten Commandments. We must have contrition for our sins as well, aware that our sins hurt God, the Church, others, and even ourselves. We can be sorry for them because through them we may lose Heaven ("imperfect contrition") or just because God is good and deserving of all our love. And we need to decide to sin no more. That doesn't mean that we won't, or that we won't desire the same sins again, we will probably be back to confession, often for the same stuff. Some things to remember: First, before Confession examine your conscience to know what to confess. Start Confession with the Sign of the Cross. "Bless me Father for I have sinned, it has been x time since my last confession, here are my sins." Name your sins, at least all the big ones you can remember, (I lied/stole/was angry 3 times etc.) End the confession by letting the priest know, like "for these and for all my sins I am truly sorry". The priest may give you some counsel and give you a penance to do as soon as possible. Pray your act of contrition (lots of good ones but here is an example). My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy. The Priest will absolve you of your sins through the prayer of absolution. The priest will then say, "your sins are forgiven, go in peace" and you can respond, thanks be to God.

Then do your penance as soon as possible. Remember, the priest can never say anything about your sins to anyone ever, otherwise he is excommunicated (kicked out of communion with the Church) and must go to Rome to be reconciled. It's completely safe and confidential! Catholics are required to go to Confession once a year at minimum, but during Advent and Lent, or even once a month can be a good practice. Priests have to go to other priests for Confession, and it is a great gift that Jesus gave us to know we are forgiven and experience his great Mercy!

Your Pastor,
Fr. Tyler

Sunday, September 4th, 2022

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



Parish and Pastorate life don't happen randomly, it takes planning and direction to make something happen or even just to maintain what we have. I am very thankful for the finance councils of our parishes for their work and dedication in ensuring the financial future of the parishes and maintaining and improving our facilities. A lot happens behind the scenes and especially as a new pastor I am very thankful for our parishioner's dedication and knowledge.

A parish is more than a place to celebrate Mass on Sunday, it is a community of the faithful, who have a mission given by Jesus Christ, to "go out, teach and baptize all nations." That takes planning too. The Pastorate has a mission to extend the kingdom of God in our corner of Iowa, to bring Jesus to those who are not his disciples, to re-engage those who have fallen out of practice, and to grow ourselves into better disciples, more capable of carrying out the mission and one day enjoying the fullness of the kingdom in Heaven. We need planners for that too! What do we think makes a vibrant parish, and how do we get there or do it better? Where do you think the Lord is leading us?

First two weeks of school have been great! We trained servers last week, any kids who have been trained are welcome to serve at any Mass in the Pastorate. They are excited to start!

Labor Day on Monday means our office will be closed, and no school. It's good to rest! Sometimes work can become a "god" so it's just as important to rest. We don't live to work, we work to live!

Grandparents Day is on the 8th, pray for and make a visit to your grandparents! Grandparents are an important influence on the faith of their grandchildren, so grandparents, never underestimate your witness!

See you at Sherrill Fest on the 10th (maybe from a float?)! Because of Sherrill's need for our facilities, Mass at 6pm on the 10th will be in Luxemburg.

Your pastor,
Fr. Tyler

Sunday August 28th, 2022

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



Sometimes it feels like everything comes at once!

School took off this week, and it's wonderful to see all the kids, their excitement and joy and even sometimes a little attitude. I got to play kick ball at recess at La Salle, although I was made "all time pitcher", and bless the classrooms and the kids backpacks. It's a little fun to sprinkle them with holy water!

Down at Beckman it's awesome to see a new group of 7th graders coming in and inviting them to think about who they want to be in 5 years, and the seniors there who are ready to take leadership and dive even deeper in their faith.

Some sad news, on Friday I had the funeral for my grandmother down in Cedar Rapids. She was a very supportive woman for me in my vocation to priesthood and she will be missed.

But, my sister also had her first baby, Rose, this last week! First time uncle!

Sometimes you can only laugh at what God decides to give you in a week. A deacon I knew, when things seemed to be crazy used to say "Jesus come and squeeze us" as his little prayer. Sometimes that's all you need!

Monday I'll be in Dyersville at the priest golf outing, a great time for brotherhood even if my golf game is less than stunning!

We have our first Confirmation meeting on Wednesday night in Holy Cross. Please say a prayer for the candidates and their sponsors.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Tyler

Sunday August 21st, 2022

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



It's back to school time! Prayers for all the teachers, faculty, and staff in our area schools, may this be a blessed year for them. There's no more important work than educating and forming the youth, and we are especially thankful in the Pastorate for the leadership of our principal, Mrs. Brenda Lansing and her team. They've been hard at work this summer preparing the building for the kids! Please consider helping to support our school through the First Annual Appeal.

Education is more than just learning facts or taking tests, it is ultimately about forming people into fully realized human persons, who are not only capable of going to good colleges or getting good jobs, but capable of using all the gifts and talents God has blessed them with to be truly happy and contribute to the common good of all. In our Catholic schools we can include, actually keep at the center, the whole purpose of life, being united with God, to know, serve, and love Him in this life, so as to be happy with Him forever in the next, as the old Catechism put it.

It is an exciting time looking forward to a new year, full of opportunity and potential. But education is not something that ends after twelve or sixteen years, it is a project for life. Until the day we are perfect, saints, then we are asked to grow, to be students ourselves. Our Heavenly Father "disciplines" us through out our lives because we are not yet all we can be, all we need to be. Discipline comes from the same word as Disciple, one who is learning.

Think back maybe on when you were in school, starting a new year, looking at your schedule, excited for some classes or subjects, ready to get back into a sport or music or FFA or science club or drama. There's a lot of joy when we look at what we can become, imagine it, approach the future with possibility. We are still learning, growing, disciples becoming saints. We need humility to know we are not yet finished, and the hope to pursue the amazing possibilities that God is inviting us to.

"You can do more with the grace of God than you think!"- St John Baptist de La Salle Pray for us!

Your Pastor,
Fr. Tyler

Sunday August 14th, 2022

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



We had some great news this week in the parishes, we've been running out of bulletins! Why? I'm not sure, maybe multiple things. Ushers have been handing out bulletins at the end of Mass to people walking out, a good marker of hospitality and inviting people to check out and participate in all the events going on in the Pastorate. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are bringing the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist to the homebound, and often a bulletin with them so they can stay connected with their parishes and the community. As the summer comes to an end, schedules become (a little) more consistent as vacations are over, and with that maybe the rhythm of life goes back to celebrating Sunday Mass in the parishes.

Even with visibly growing numbers at Mass, there is nothing more important for the future of our parishes than making personal invitations to worship on Sunday, to attend and participate in our parish functions, and in general to a deeper life of faith in Christ. The problem is that it can feel intensely awkward! But as we are reminded in our readings this weekend, the Christian life is not always comfortable. It includes division, rejection of the message and messenger, perhaps even the shedding of our own blood as Hebrews says.

Maybe there is someone you know, or someone that God puts on your heart whom you miss seeing at Mass, or want them to know the joy of community and Communion, is God asking us to take that step outside of ourselves to invite someone back?

Your Pester,
Fr. Tyler

Sunday August 7th, 2022

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



This weekend I'll be installed officially as pastor of our La Salle Pastorate Parishes. Feels a little odd to be installed a few weeks after being pastor here, but it has been a good moment of reflection for myself, even after only three weeks!

It has been an incredible blessing to be with you and I look forward to the years ahead. You have been incredibly welcoming, positive, and patient since I have arrived, and I know the warmth I have received is not just what people do, I've heard stories of priests who have arrived in places that have been much less hospitable, so I think everyone should take pride in that!

I've been learning so much here as well, the benefit of finance councils meeting in July, and have been very impressed with the leadership of our parishes (and cemeteries!). And as school ramps up, I'm looking forward to getting more involved over at LaSalle as well. I've been able to visit and meet some of our parishioners in hospitals and care facilities and I am looking forward to meeting many more.

Abraham in our readings is continually called by God to get up and go, to trust in him, and the reward for that trust is that Abraham is continually shown the Glory of God who keeps his incredible promises, which strengthens his faith to trust more in God. More often, when we are afraid, or timid, it is because we forgot or are too busy to see what God has and is doing in our lives. When we pause to remember, to see, we can grow in trust of our Father who keeps his promises, and desires to lead us to more. I want to thank you for being a sign of God's goodness to me in many ways, and I look forward to continuing to serve as your priest and pastor, may God continue to bless us with Faith and Hope, that we may see now his providence, and hope for the good things he promises.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Tyler

Sunday July 31st, 2022

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



Last weekend some friends, a young family with three kids came up to visit me and see the rectory. We had some fun on the old school playground and the swing set, the little ones even enjoyed pulling up some weeds! Thankfully they came up when they did because the storms Saturday night knocked over a tree in the backyard which fell right on the swings and crushed them so now they are gone! Glad they got a final use. The church sign at Ss. Peter and Paul also blew down in the wind. I hope that nobody else got any serious damage (at least the corn looks good, from what this city boy can tell).

It was a good reminder of the message of the readings this weekend, "vanity of vanities, all is vanity" from the book of Ecclesiastes. Nothing in this world lasts forever, even stone signs and metal swings. Life is fragile and as Huey Lewis and the News reminds us "we're not here for a long time, we're here for a good time!" But for those with Christian faith, the vanity of this life is not something to fear or have anxiety over, which often leads to denial and avoiding the pain of life with distractions and "medicating" ourselves, because there is a life that lasts forever, without weeping, pain, sorrow, or storms, the Kingdom of Heaven. As Jesus reminds us, this life is about building up treasure in Heaven, which cannot be destroyed or stolen, and the things that last are Faith, Hope, and Love. Sometimes we only realize that when we lose something important to us, when our attachments to fleeting things are challenged.

As our prayers for last weekend's Mass proclaimed, "O God, protector of those who hope in you, without whom nothing has firm foundation, nothing is holy, bestow in abundance your mercy upon us and grant that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may use the good things that pass such a way as to hold fast even now to those that ever endure." May we cling to the Rock which endures forever, Jesus Christ and His Catholic Church, and never fear the storms of life.

Your pastor,
Fr. Tyler

Sunday July 24th, 2022

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER



Thank you everyone for a great first week here at the Pastorate! It is a joy to celebrate Mass with you, the most important thing we do as parishes is come together to worship God, and have fellowship with one another as the Body of Christ. As Jesus said in our Gospel last weekend, there is only one thing necessary, to be present to Jesus and receive from Him, in the Word and in the Eucharist. So a successful week!

I want to update you on a few things going on in the Pastorate. Along with being assigned as Pastor to the LaSalle Pastorate and coordinator of our Catholic school, I have also been blessed at the Archbishop's request to stay in my role as chaplain at Beckman Catholic. I spent three years there while an associate at the Spires of Faith Cluster, developed relationships and became familiar with the school community, and so it is an incredible opportunity to stay connected and build on what has been established. This is especially important for vocations work, encouraging young people to listen for and follow God's call to whatever state of life He has made them for, but especially to help young men discern if God is calling them to the wonderful vocation of the diocesan priesthood in the Archdiocese of Dubuque. It takes time, trust, and vulnerability to help youth to think about those deep questions. Hopefully with time and all in God's Grace, it will bear fruit!

Because of that I will be going down to Beckman regularly. That was the main reason I decided to move into the Luxemburg rectory, so that I could be readily present to Beckman but also so that I can reduce time going between the Pastorate and Beckman, to be more available to the Pastorate as well. The Pastorate is my first priority, but if we work together and are both flexible, then we can be generous with our priestly resources! Beckman will have school Masses on Wednesday at 10:15am (used to be Thursdays) and so after talking with some of our daily Mass attendants and Council members, I'd like to move daily Mass in Sherrill from Wednesday to Friday, and daily Mass in Luxemburg from Friday to Wednesday (a swap). I know this causes some bumps in people's schedules, our faithful daily Mass celebrants, but I thank you for your patience and understanding! Again, this allows me to be more present to our Pastorate, as well as at Beckman. I can't thank you enough for how good you have been to me as we begin this journey together. You are in my prayers, and continue to pray for me!

Your pastor,
Fr. Tyler

(This bulletin message is the first written by Fr. Tyler Raymond)

Sunday July 17th, 2022

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

A MESSAGE FROM FR. TYLER

My first Mass in the pastorate was at Saints Peter and Paul in Sherril on Wednesday and the reading that day from the Gospel was perfect. Jesus was speaking to his disciples about how God is not revealed to the wise and learned but the childlike. I certainly have felt a little childlike these last few days as I begin my assignment here with you as your pastor! To be childlike means recognizing that we are totally dependent upon God, something easy to forget when we believe (or act like) everything is dependent upon us. I am in my fourth year of priesthood, and spent my first years as a priest in the Spires of Faith Cluster just south of us as an associate priest. And while I learned a lot there, being a pastor is a totally new experience, and I feel very dependent. Dependent on our staff who have been showing me the ropes, dependent on the volunteers I've met who have helped me get adjusted, dependent on your generosity, patience, and prayers, and dependent most of all on the Father for his blessings. The great thing about being dependent, even when it is uncomfortable, is that we see Grace in places we may otherwise miss it when we try it on our own.

As a part of my assignment, I'll continue on as chaplain at Beckman Catholic in Dyersville, which is a blessing for me to be able to work with the Middle School and High School kids (and most of them seem glad I'm staying!) and sometimes people ask "how are you going to do it father?" or say "you'll be really busy father!" "good luck father!". Everyone is busy, not just father (actually most people are busier than father ;))! And all of us rely on God, and on each other. I am thankful to God for having sent me here, and already I have felt God working through all of you. As we begin this journey together, let us keep each other in prayer, for we are all childlike before our Father in Heaven. I'd love to get to know all of you, would love to visit your homes, and like to eat (except cilantro fyi)! I'm not the best with names so please don't take any offense if I ask! If there is ever anything you need, do not hesitate to ask. May Jesus the Good Shepherd and High Priest bless us all.

I am, your priest,
Fr. Tyler

(This bulletin message is the last written by Fr. Noah Diehm)

Sunday July 10th, 2022

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

It's here, my last weekend in the pastorate. Thank you for the experiences of collaboration, support, and community over the last 8 years. Thank you for the kindness you've shown me. Thank you for your dedication to your parish and to the faith. Together, we've repaired or replaced church roofs; painted church interiors; repaved church parking lots; consolidated La Salle Catholic School into one building; navigated our way through a global pandemic; made blankets and gifts for the elderly; supported local pro-life organizations; gathered food for the poor; celebrated many weddings, baptisms, and funerals; participated in a bus trip to the Christ our Life conference; made a bus pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Cross, WI; expanded how we financially support our parishes with EFT transactions and IRA disbursements; increased financial transparency in the bulletin and by mailing out the annual parish financial report; updated the bulletin; updated how we get our tithing envelopes; paid off parish debt; replaced the furnaces in three churches (equipping one with new air conditioning); updated the rectories in Rickardsville and Luxemburg; installed new parish center gym or parish basement flooring in two churches; published an updated pastorate directory (due for another update soon); and attended many parish fundraisers.

I'm grateful for what's been able to be done in in the past 8 years. But more than what we've accomplished, I'm grateful for the way in which we've grown as a pastorate. I hope we see each other as brothers and sisters. I hope we see ourselves as one family of faith, united by our common baptism. And above all, I hope we see ourselves as disciples of Jesus, learning from Him and putting His teaching into practice. It takes a lot of people to be a parish. All of you are part of that. Thank you for working with me as a leader and collaborator over these past 8 years. I really appreciate the experience I've gained here and will put it to good use in the future. God bless each of you!

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

Jesus – “Go and do likewise”

In this weekend's Gospel, Jesus encounters a scholar of the law who wished to justify his own behavior about who was and who wasn't his neighbor. In response, Jesus offers what we've come to know as the parable of the Good Samaritan. As happens in so many of Jesus' parables, it's subtly subversive, inverting what the listeners might expect to hear. Samaritans were outsiders to Jews. But Jesus makes a Samaritan the hero of His parable. The parable's victim's movement “*from Jerusalem to Jericho*” might signify a movement away from God (Jerusalem) and toward the world (Jericho). So the victim in the parable falling into the hands of robbers

might make sense and maybe even feel just to the Jewish religious mind. A priest and Levite both fail to help the robber's victim. But an unlikely hero, a Samaritan, comes to the victim's aid. Ultimately, we can think of the Samaritan as Jesus Himself and He comes to our aid, we who have been beat up by the world. The parable tells us that the Samaritan went above and beyond the call of duty. And then comes the fundamental question by Jesus addressed to the scholar, "*Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robber's victim?*" Not surprisingly, the scholar understood that "*The one who treated him with mercy*" was the hero of the story. Jesus then says, "*Go and do likewise.*" Jesus' message is simple – we love our neighbor when we do good to those in need. Our neighbor is anyone and everyone, those who think and act and vote like we do, and those who don't do anything like we do. If we want to love our neighbor, we're called to imitate the Good Samaritan in Jesus' parable; ultimately, we're called to imitate Jesus Himself. He's the model for us. He prayed for those who beat and crucified Him. He forgave sinners. He had mercy on social outcasts like lepers and tax collectors. What are we called to do? "*Go and do likewise.*" May Jesus inspire our love of our neighbor, whoever that neighbor might be.

Sunday July 3rd, 2022

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

In the Gospel, Jesus sends His disciples out on mission. But prior to giving His disciples their instructions, He says, "*The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.*" We often use this text to talk about vocations to the priesthood; and it's true, we need more priests to be pastors, chaplains, and spiritual directors. But at the same time, let's not restrict the Lord's words to priests. All of us can be the Lord's laborers, insofar as we're baptized, confirmed, and living as people of faith in the world. The laborers are not just ordained priests. Every parish needs dedicated lay volunteers who give of their time both within the parish and outside the parish. And the people who are already within the parish need to go outside so that those who are outside the parish may come within so that they can enter a saving relationship with God.

St. Paul says in his letter to the Romans, "*For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? "* (Romans 10:13-14). The laborers Jesus wants to send out into the world to bring in the Lord's harvest are you and me. You don't need a theology degree. But you do need to understand the good news of the Gospel: "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.*" (John 3:16) And if we understand that, we have everything

we need to take the good news we hear INSIDE church and share it with all those OUTSIDE. May God give us the strength to live as laborers to bring in His harvest of souls.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

The Courage to Share Good News

I know it can be intimidating to bring up matters of faith with people. We know that people might get turned off or think that we're being "preachy" or that we're "pushing our religion on them." Nonetheless, if we care about the salvation of souls, we have to bring up matters of faith with others. But we can do it without being preachy or pushy. We just have to be courageous. The best practice is by being a witness, in both our words and deeds. If someone we know is struggling, we can ask them if we can pray for them or, if we're feeling bold, we can offer to pray with them right then and there in the moment. Prayer can be an **experience** of the faith, which is often more powerful than simply talking about it. We can invite others to join us for experiences of prayer and worship – to come with us to Mass, or to pray together before a meal if we have friends or neighbors over for lunch or supper. We can bring up faith in conversations – *"Don't you think the world might be a better place if we gave God a little more room in our lives?"* We can give meaningful gifts of faith, such as a crucifix, a Bible, a Divine Mercy image, a statue of Jesus or Mary, or a prayer book (NOTE: I'd actually recommend NOT giving someone a Rosary unless they're familiar with how to pray a Rosary). We can witness to our faith with Catholic apparel – a Catholic t-shirt with a good message, or a hat with a Catholic theme, or by wearing a religious medal or crucifix around our neck. We can put bumper stickers on our car that proclaims a message of the love of God. We can tell a cashier at a store, a waiter or waitress at a restaurant, or someone when they sneeze, "God bless you." However we do it, we are asked to share our faith. And we can do it in simple ways that aren't preachy or pushy. And as we share our faith with those around us, we can be a blessing and a source of encouragement to others. We might even change someone's life.

Sunday June 26th, 2022

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

This Saturday, June 25th, I'm privileged to celebrate 11 years of priesthood. It was June 25th, 2011 when I was ordained a priest together with my classmate, Fr. Tony Kruse, from Petersburg. I'm grateful to God for 11 years of priesthood, three years in the Spires of Faith Cluster and eight years here in the La Salle Pastorate. A little reminder that next weekend (July 2/3) we switch to the July – September Mass schedule: Saturday 4 p.m. in Holy Cross, Saturday 6 p.m. in Sherrill, Sunday 8 a.m. in Balltown, and Sunday 10 a.m. in Rickardsville. The good news: three of the four Mass options for this quarter have air conditioning, so that should help a bit with the heat.

This weekend's readings speak to us about the demands of discipleship, and the demands of living in community with fellow believers. Regarding the latter category, St. Paul says, *"For you were called for freedom, brothers and sisters. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you on biting and devouring one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another."* Love of neighbor is what we're about. Any semblance of factions or fighting should be wholly abolished. And when we set our minds to following Jesus, we should remember that Jesus asks for our whole heart – *"No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what is left behind is fit for the kingdom of God."* When we seek to follow Jesus, we don't look back, even though it may be tempting to do so. Jesus would have us set our eyes forward, focused on striving for the kingdom of God, and likewise focused on loving others and inviting them into relationship with God. Let's use our freedom to love others and follow Jesus without looking back to what we leave behind. May God give us the strength we need!

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

Our Call: to Become Jesus' Disciples

As I prepare to end my time in the pastorate, I've been thinking about the work I've done while I've been here. It's my hope that I've helped all of you become and live as disciples of Jesus. When the Pastorate Council was talking about a mission statement for the pastorate, we settled on a statement focused on discipleship: *"Our mission: to form intentional disciples of Jesus Christ."* I certainly hope that, for my part, I helped to make this a reality in your life. But the truth is that discipleship is hard work. It's easy to think about living as a disciple of Jesus when everything is going well, but it's harder to live our faith (i.e. live as a disciple of Jesus) when life gets rough. But it's then that our faith is meant to be the rock foundation that gets us through the difficult times. So, how are we living our faith? Is our faith something we just practice on the weekend by coming to Mass? Or is our faith a living relationship with the One who created us, who loved us even to the point of death, and who fills us with spiritual life? Our faith needs to be put into practice in order to make it real and tangible and meaningful. The concrete expression our faith is discipleship: learning from Jesus, and then putting His teaching into practice. Doing that, we become more merciful, more loving, more willing to forgive, more inclined to help out the poor and those in need, and essentially, more like Jesus. In essence, He begins to live His life in us. St. Paul said, *"For through the law I died to the law, that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me."* (Galatians 2:19-20). May God give us all the grace we need to live our faith by following Jesus, learning from Him, and putting His teaching into action as one of His disciples.

Sunday June 19th, 2022

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

Let me begin with GRATITUDE: I'm grateful for the experience of last weekend and the farewell gathering that was put on for me. It was great to be with so many people and take so many selfies and enjoy fellowship. I'm very grateful for the experience that I've gained during my 8 years in this assignment. And I'm grateful for everyone who welcomed me and showed me kindness over the years. I hope I've returned the favor many times over. As of now, I'll have three more weekends in the pastorate – June 25/26, July 2/3, and July 9/10. I'll be grateful to celebrate each of them with all of you. And more on GRATITUDE, I'm thankful for the example of fathers as we celebrate Father's Day this weekend. I'm grateful for dads who are involved in their children's lives, who come to Mass and set a good example, and who provide spiritual leadership to their families. We cannot underestimate the impact of a good father. Let's continue to pray for all fathers, that they may be a blessing to their families.

Finally, on the same note of GRATITUDE: the Eucharist. This weekend we celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (often called Corpus Christi). Did you know that the word "Eucharist" literally means "thanksgiving"? When we celebrate the Eucharist, we offer Thanksgiving to God for His saving activity toward us and for the ways in which He's blessed us. Every week we are given 168 hours. It's good, once a week, to offer one of those hours to God in thanksgiving. That's why we come to Mass. We celebrate and receive Holy Communion in thanksgiving for God's blessings. Is it always easy to be thankful? No, often it's easier to complain. But thanksgiving and gratitude must become a way of life for people of faith. Our eyes should be fixed on what's good, not what's evil. May God inspire within us a spirit of GRATITUDE for the ways in which He's blessed us.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

Why I'm Catholic: The Eucharist

There may be many good reasons to be Catholic: we have seven more books of the Old Testament; we have the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints and their extraordinary lives; we have the Pope, the visible head and sign of unity within the Church; we have extraordinary appearances of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe, and beyond; we have amazing traditions of sacred art and sacred sculpture; we have innovations of science and technology (e.g. the Big Bang Theory was postulated by a Catholic priest); we have amazing traditions of sacred teaching by theologians and the doctors of the Church; we are blessed with beautiful parish churches for communal worship; but more than all of that, we have the ONE GIFT BETTER THAN ALL OTHERS: the most Holy Eucharist, the sacrament of the Lord's Body and Blood, which He gave to His Church as an everlasting memorial of His saving

passion and death. If there were only ONE reason to be Catholic, it would be the Eucharist, which we celebrate this weekend. As Catholics, our faith in the Eucharist is differentiated from the belief in “the Lord’s Supper” among Protestants. We believe in a fancy word, TRANSUBSTANTIATION: we believe that during the Mass, the substance of the bread and wine are changed from that of bread and wine into the substance of the Lord’s Body and Blood. Some Protestants believe that it’s merely a symbol. In response to that kind of reasoning, Flannery O’Connor (Catholic author) once famously declared, “*If it’s only a symbol, to hell with it!*” The Gospel of John, chapter 6, the great Bread of Life discourse, gives us solid reasons for our belief in the Eucharist (as well as elsewhere in the New Testament). So, even if the Church suffers at the hands of corrupt bishops and priests, I’ll never turn my back on the Eucharist. The Eucharist is Jesus, His abiding presence with us. It’s the fulfillment of His promise at the end of Matthew’s Gospel: “*And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age,*” (see Matthew 28:20). May we all treasure the Eucharist as the “*pearl of great price,*” the treasure worth selling everything we own in order to obtain (see Matthew 13:45-46).

Sunday June 12th, 2022

Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

This weekend we celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity (which is the patronal feast day of Holy Trinity parish in Luxemburg – happy feast day! FYI, Ss. Peter & Paul parish in Sherrill will celebrate their patronal feast day later this month on Wednesday June 29th). The revelation of the Holy Trinity is distinct to the New Testament, with the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, and the descent of the Spirit of God. Although non-Christian religions such as Judaism and Islam also profess belief in one God, Christianity is unique because it professes belief in one God who is manifest as three Persons, distinct in their Personhood, but substantially united in their shared divinity. This “mystery” of the Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian faith. By “mystery,” we don’t mean “*what can’t be known,*” but rather, “*that which is infinitely knowable.*” We’ll never know God completely. Even in heaven, we’ll spend eternity being drawn into the infinite love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Perhaps the best way to understand God is through the dynamic of LOVE. The New Testament First Letter of St. John tells us that God is love. And love implies multiplicity. We can speak about God the Father as the Lover, God the Son as the Beloved, and God the Holy Spirit as the Love between the Father and the Son. This helps us realize that love is not incidental to God, but rather it’s who God is. God’s essence is love. All of God’s actions are actions of love. Those who are saved are those who believe in and receive the love of God, and those who are cast out are those reject the love of God through their disbelief. Does God judge anyone? Only insofar as He confirms the choice that each person makes about Him. Because God gave us freedom so

that we could freely choose Him. This weekend, may our hearts freely embrace the infinite love of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

The Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity

If you really want to be a smarty-pants about the Trinity, according to orthodox Catholic theology, there are two ways to speak about the Trinity – the “imminent” Trinity, which deals with the mystery of God in Himself, and the “economic” Trinity, which deals with the mystery of God in His relationship to creation. As created beings, it is easiest to speak about the “economic” Trinity and how the Triune God reveals Himself to humanity throughout history. But through theology and revelation, we can know something about the mystery of God in Himself. Traditional Catholic theology ascribes different “attributes” to God. These attributes are revealed in scripture, and help us know what God is like in His essence. God is “omniscient” – God knows all things, and there are no secrets that can be hidden from His sight. Likewise, He is “omnipresent” - He is all-present, and He exists outside of space and time and thus is present to all people everywhere at all times. He is “omnibenevolent” – He is all-good, and there is no trace of evil within Him as there is within humanity because of original sin. He is “omnipotent” – that is, all-powerful, and there is nothing so great that God’s power can’t accomplish (NOTE: the famous question, “Can God make a rock so big that He can’t lift it?” is a logical impossibility, and so is not a limit on His power). Furthermore, God is “immutable” – He is unchanging, and from age to age He remains the same, and so the God who revealed Himself to Moses is the same God made known by Jesus. We Catholic Christians dare to say that we possess the fullness of God’s revelation because God has revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And we hope and pray that more and more people turn away from false idols and come to know the one, true God. We hope and pray that those who believe in God apart from Christianity (Jews and Muslims, in particular) would come to know the fullness of revelation in the Christian faith. All of this describes the God we are invited to know and live in relationship with because of our Christian faith.

Sunday June 5th, 2022
Solemnity of Pentecost, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

Happy Pentecost! Today is the birthday of the Church since it was on this day – 50 days after the Lord’s resurrection and nine days following the Lord’s Ascension – that the Spirit came down to the disciples to fill them with His gifts and empower them for continuing the work which Jesus came to accomplish. The Lord’s ministry began with the descent of the Spirit at His baptism (see Matt. 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22, John 1:32); and in similar fashion, the Church’s ministry of

evangelization and making disciples began with the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the gathered believers. The Spirit's descent upon Jesus at His baptism and the Spirit's descent upon the disciples remind us that the Spirit and the divine strength He gives are meant to be at the heart of the Church. We can confidently say that the Lord Jesus wants a Church filled with the power, grace, gifts, and inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

As I believe I've already related, the Holy Spirit is often the forgotten Person of the Holy Trinity. We know about the Father and the Son well enough (hopefully!), but we need to know the Holy Spirit better. And that's why it's important that we read the scriptures. The New Testament is replete with references to the Holy Spirit, and if we have a biblically-grounded faith, the Holy Spirit will already be a part of our lives. But as it is, most of us would do well to give the Holy Spirit more "room" to "breathe" within us. In fact, Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on the disciples in the Gospel. The Spirit should be as close to us as our very breath, and indeed He is the lifebreath of our souls. When God created human beings, He did so by breathing into them the breath of life (see Genesis 2:7). Let's pray that the Holy Spirit would dwell deep within our souls and that we would more readily follow His inspirations.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

The Holy Spirit in the Catechism

687) "No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." Now God's Spirit, who reveals God, makes known to us Christ, his Word, his living Utterance, but the Spirit does not speak of himself. The Spirit who "has spoken through the prophets" makes us hear the Father's Word, but we do not hear the Spirit himself. We know him only in the movement by which he reveals the Word to us and disposes us to welcome him in faith. The Spirit of truth who "unveils" Christ to us "will not speak on his own." Such properly divine self-effacement explains why "the world cannot receive (him), because it neither sees him nor knows him," while those who believe in Christ know the Spirit because he dwells with them. **688)** The Church, a communion living in the faith of the apostles which she transmits, is the place where we know the Holy Spirit: in the Scriptures he inspired; in the Tradition, to which the Church Fathers are always timely witnesses; in the Church's Magisterium, which he assists; in the sacramental liturgy, through its words and symbols, in which the Holy Spirit puts us into communion with Christ; in prayer, wherein he intercedes for us; in the charisms and ministries by which the Church is built up; in the signs of apostolic and missionary life; in the witness of saints through whom he manifests his holiness and continues the work of salvation. **689)** The One whom the Father has sent into our hearts, the Spirit of his Son, is truly God. Consubstantial with the Father and the Son, the Spirit is inseparable from them, in both the inner life of the Trinity and his gift of love for the world. In adoring the Holy Trinity, life-giving, consubstantial, and indivisible, the Church's faith also professes the distinction of persons. When the Father sends his Word, he always sends his Breath. In their joint mission, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct but inseparable. To be sure, it is Christ who is seen, the visible image of the invisible God, but it is the Spirit who reveals him.

Sunday May 29th, 2022

Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

Both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles are attributed to St. Luke's authorship. Together, Luke and Acts are a kind of "volume 1" and "volume 2" about the lives of Jesus and the disciples. In both the first reading and the Gospel, then, we hear Jesus speaking about the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' ascension is the requisite condition under which the Spirit will fall upon the disciples at Pentecost. Because He is going to the Father, the Holy Spirit will come to them. Jesus' ascension is an amazing exaltation of His humanity. Because of His ascension, a true man is now forever seated at the right hand of God. Indeed, all of humanity has been exalted at God's right hand in the person of Jesus, the Word made flesh. This great dignity shown to humanity is a consequence of the Lord's incarnation, which is the first and greatest compliment to being human.

Together, the Ascension and Pentecost reveal God's plan for humanity. In the Ascension, something human (Jesus, in His true human nature) is taken up to heaven; and in like manner, at Pentecost, something divine (the Holy Spirit, with all His gifts) comes down to earth. Together, they reveal God's desire to exalt us at His right hand (the Ascension), and His desire to be with us throughout this life (Pentecost). The Preface for the Ascension declares, *"For after His resurrection, He plainly appeared to all his disciples and was taken up to heaven in their sight, that he might make us sharers in his divinity."* It's God's will that we participate with Jesus in His divine exaltation. Because He has taken on our flesh, He has made it possible for us to participate in His divine nature. Because He has ascended to the right hand of God, we have the hope of being joined with Him there. With this hope, let's also pray for a new openness to the Holy Spirit to receive Him and all His gifts and blessings.

God bless,

Fr. Diehm

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

The following prayer was used in 1962 before the opening of the Second Vatican Council. It is a prayer addressed to the Holy Spirit, petitioning the Spirit for enlightenment, wisdom, and guidance. We might still use this prayer today as we prepare to celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost next weekend. In these days leading up to Pentecost, prayerfully consider how the Holy Spirit might desire to use you and the unique gifts He's given to you to build up the Kingdom of God around you. Prayerfully consider how He might accomplish a "Pentecost" in your life with your openness to His coming to you, personally. And please pray that a "New Pentecost" might be accomplished in the life of the Church, that more and more Christians will spiritually come to life by the power of the Holy Spirit to carry out the work of evangelization which Jesus wanted His Church to do. In that way, more and more people will come to know the

love of God in their hearts and the world will come to experience the healing power of His great love. Here's the prayer: *"We stand before you, Holy Spirit, conscious of our sinfulness, but aware that we gather in your name. Come to us, remain with us, and enlighten our hearts. Give us light and strength to know your will, to make it our own, and to live it in our lives. Guide us by your wisdom, support us by your power, for you are God, sharing the glory of Father and Son. You desire justice for all: enable us to uphold the rights of others; do not allow us to be misled by ignorance or corrupted by fear or favor. Unite us to yourself in the bond of love and keep us faithful to all that is true. As we gather in your name may we temper justice with love, so that all our decisions may be pleasing to you, and earn the reward promised to good and faithful servants. You live and reign with the Father and the Son, One God, forever and ever. Amen."*

Sunday May 22nd, 2022
6th Sunday of Easter, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

This weekend Jesus speaks about the coming of *"the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name..."* Jesus says further that the Holy Spirit *"...will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you."* We can't underestimate the value and the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. Nonetheless, the Holy Spirit is often the forgotten Person of the Holy Trinity. We're familiar with the Father and the Son, but the Holy Spirit often seems less well known. What can we say about the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is God. As such, He is a divine Person – we refer to the Holy Spirit as "He" rather than "it" or any other impersonal form of address. The Holy Spirit is understood as proceeding from both the Father and the Son, and He acts in union with the Son in carrying out the Father's will. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is the final element of the full revelation of God as Trinity.

During this time, we should spiritually prepare ourselves for the coming of the Holy Spirit with the celebration of Pentecost. After we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord next weekend on the 29th (transferred from Thursday the 26th), we'll celebrate Pentecost on June 5th. These days leading up to Pentecost are a good time for us to pray for greater openness to the Spirit's activity in our lives. For example, do we follow the inspirations of the Spirit when we feel inspired to pray or act? Do we allow ourselves to be convicted by the Holy Spirit when we've fallen into sin? Do we ask the Holy Spirit to help us remember the teachings of Jesus? Do we pray for the strength to fight against temptation, the strength which comes from the Spirit? The Holy Spirit is eager to come to our help. Likewise, let's be eager to allow the Holy Spirit to make His dwelling in our mind and heart; He is our Advocate, God's constant presence with us. God bless,
Fr. Diehm

The Peace which Jesus gives His Disciples

In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.*" This 14th chapter of St. John's Gospel, along with John 15 and 16, are part of Jesus' Last Supper discourses, also known as His Farewell discourses (because He would soon be parted from His disciples in His passion and death). The peace which Jesus gives His disciples is meant to strengthen their hearts for what's to come. They would be distressed by the news of His passion and death; and His peace would be needed in order to help them hold on to faith and hope in light of the "scandal" of the Cross. But what is this peace which Jesus gave His disciples? It's not simply the absence of trial or turmoil – after all, there would be plenty of that for them to experience in Jesus' passion and death. Rather, Jesus' peace is ultimately the presence of God. If they choose to live within that gift of peace, they can trust that God is in control. But if they choose to exit that peace through worry, their faith would begin to waver and they would begin to question whether God was actually in control. Peace is also a fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23), so it's no wonder Jesus speaks about His peace after talking about the coming of the Holy Spirit. God wants peace for us. Jesus gives us His gift of supernatural peace in order to strengthen us and help us remember that God is with us. Will we choose to live within the peace which He gave to His disciples, or will we choose worry instead? The choice is pretty clear: choose to live within Jesus' gift of peace; choose to live with faith in God's providential care; worry won't do us any good. May we receive the peace of Jesus; may that peace dwell within our hearts and minds; and may we trust that God is always in control of every situation.

Sunday May 15th, 2022
5th Sunday of Easter, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

As Catholics, we believe in the living Word of God, that God's revealed word continually speaks to the hearts and minds of believers, and that it has something to say to every generation. I certainly find that to be true this weekend with the readings set before us for the 5th Sunday of Easter. In the Gospel, Jesus gives His disciples His "new commandment": "*...love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*" With all the toxicity in the world, the practice of genuine love of others is all the more important. Because, Christians are called to look different from the rest of the world. We are to be distinguished by our practice of love for each other. A Christian should always and everywhere be a person who loves others (especially those who are hard to love). This is what marks a Christian as a disciple of the Lord Jesus. Anyone can be "nice," anyone can be "courteous," but a Christian, especially, should be loving. What does that look like? It looks like the sacrificial love that Jesus Himself demonstrated to His disciples – love willing to die to self.

In the second reading, God says, "*Behold, I make all things new.*" That should be first of all true for us, the People of God. How are we to be made new? With every reception of the sacraments, with every prayer, with every act of self-denial, with every time we pick up our cross (whatever that cross may be) and follow Jesus. No one's saying that living our faith is easy. In fact, it may be the hardest thing we ever try to live. It calls us to die to self. It calls us to let go of our own interests. It calls us to pray, "*Thy will be done.*" As Paul and Barnabas testified to in the first reading, "*It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.*" Is that something we're willing to embrace - many hardships - in order to enter the kingdom of God? It's only possible with the help of God. If at times it feels like you're going through more than you can handle, ask God to fill you up where you feel weak. May God, who makes all things new, help us to live and to love like Jesus, His Son.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

The New Jerusalem of Revelation

St. John speaks of a New Jerusalem in today's second reading from the book of Revelation. What are we to make of this? The New Jerusalem is undoubtedly the Church perfected, the Church made radiant, the Church in splendor, the Church made ready to meet Christ the Lord. The Church fulfills what God always wanted Israel to be. In fact, the Church is the new Israel, constituted by the Lord, with the Twelve apostles taking the place of the Twelve tribes of Israel. The Church has the real "bread from heaven," the Holy Eucharist, that was foreshadowed by the manna, the "bread from heaven" that the Israelites received during their pilgrimage through the desert after the Exodus. The New Jerusalem is the city all of us should aspire to dwell in after our life in this world is ended. We anticipate and help realize our citizenship in that holy city every time we participate in the Mass. We are taken up into the life of God - the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - by starting with the Sign of the Cross. We're drawn into the life of Jesus when we hear about His life in the Gospel. As we prepare to celebrate the Eucharist, we sing with all the Angels, "Holy, holy, holy..." We are mystically incorporated and brought into communion with the whole Church - on earth, in purgatory, and in heaven - when we receive the living Jesus in Holy Communion. Empowered by the grace of the Eucharist, we're strengthened to go out and share the good news of the Gospel with others in the dismissal, "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life." The New Jerusalem is our home. We're not living there now, but we can look forward in hope and anticipation to that great day when the New Jerusalem is fully realized with all citizens fully present and accounted for. We can and should hope to be among the Saints when they go marching into that heavenly abode. This week, consider: how often do I think about the life of heaven? How much do I want heaven for my neighbor? Let's pray that the New Jerusalem may be filled with more and more expectant citizens by our efforts to share the good news of God's love with those we meet.

4th Sunday of Easter, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

This weekend we observe Mother's Day, May Crowning of Mary, the 4th Sunday of Easter sometimes known as "Good Shepherd Sunday," and the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. That's a lot for one weekend. But we give thanks to God for the gift of mothers, the women who brought us into this world; and for Mary, our mother in the order of grace, for the way in which she helps Jesus come alive in us; for Jesus, our Good Shepherd; and for the gift of vocations, especially vocations to the priesthood, so we can all continue to be nourished by the Body and Blood of the Lord, experience divine help in the midst of sickness, and know God's mercy after we've fallen into sin. As much as I love all of these things we're celebrating this weekend, I think the need to talk about vocations is most pressing. There's no two ways about it: we need more priests. More priests to be pastors of parishes. More priests to hear confessions. More priests to offer Mass for the souls of the faithful departed. More priests to anoint the sick.

Can I ask all of us to please pray and beg God to send us more priests? And can I ask all of us to support vocations to the priesthood among our family and friends? Priests don't come out of nowhere. They come from specific families. From our pastorate, I'm aware of Fr. Tony Sigwarth, from Balltown, and Fr. Richard Gaul, from Luxemburg, both of whom have passed on to their eternal reward. Who will be the next man from the pastorate to be ordained a priest? Who will be the next to enter religious life? Who will be the next to serve as a missionary disciple of Jesus? On this World Day of Prayer for Vocations, please, please, please pray for vocations. May Mary, Help of Christians, help all of us (and this weekend, especially mothers) to live our vocations with generous love for God and others.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

Why do Catholics honor the Blessed Virgin Mary?

The short answer is, because God honored Mary. Fundamentally, we honor Mary because she was chosen by God to bear in her immaculate womb the only begotten Son of God, Jesus the Christ. We honor Mary because Jesus honored Mary as He perfectly fulfilled the 4th commandment: You shall honor your father and your mother. We honor Mary because Jesus loved Mary. He performed His first miracle because she prompted Him to do so (see John 2:1-11). Jesus entrusted Mary to His beloved disciple at the foot of the cross (see John 19:25-27), and just as John took Mary into his home, so every Christian is invited to take Mary into their home, too. Mary was among the disciples present at Pentecost for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and she no doubt helped the disciples open themselves to the Spirit just as the same Spirit had come upon her decades earlier at the Annunciation (see Acts 1:13-14 and Luke 1:35). Mary was undoubtedly an invaluable source of information about the life of Jesus for the first disciples and the early Church. Eventually, she would be recognized as the spiritual mother of all who follow Jesus (see Revelation 12:17). Furthermore, she's an excellent example of treasuring the works of God in her heart (see Luke 2:19 and 2:51). She deserves the highest

honor, because God bestowed the highest honor on her in calling her to virginal motherhood of Jesus. She was united to Jesus in all things, especially in His passion, as she shared spiritually in it with the sword of sorrow that pierced her heart (see Luke 2:35). We honor Mary because God honored her first; it is right and just for us to do likewise. So, consider: do you have a devotion to Mary? If not, why not? Personally, I wear the scapular of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel every day, and honor Mary with a nightly prayer after Night Prayer. And beyond that, I often pray the Hail Mary or the Memorare, and ask Mary to watch over those I love. May we all be devoted to Mary, our spiritual mother.

Sunday May 1st, 2022

3rd Sunday of Easter, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

This weekend's Gospel gives us Jesus' third resurrection appearance to His disciples, according to John. Jesus, who can enter rooms though doors are locked, and who can vanish from people's eyes in an instant, reveals Himself to His disciples who are on a boat and invites them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. After catching nothing on their own, but then following Jesus' command, the Gospel tells us that they pull in a large number of fish, but the nets were not torn. There may be many interpretations, but one interpretation might suggest the Church as the net and the people of the world as the fish, and the Church can accommodate all the people of the world among its members and not be broken. The sharing of the meal on the shore has elements of Eucharistic symbolism. We, too, are invited into communion with the risen Lord at every Mass. The Body of Christ which we receive as Holy Communion is a sharing in the risen Body of Jesus. He shares His risen body with us so that we might share in His risen life.

At the end of the passage, Peter's exchange with Jesus is significant. His threefold confession of love for Jesus redeems his threefold denial of Jesus during Jesus' passion. Jesus' command to Peter to "Feed my lambs," "Tend my sheep," and "Feed my sheep" correspond to Peter's role in the Church as the chief shepherd. St. Peter's successor, the Pope, takes on Peter's role in the Church today. And as much as those words are addressed to Peter, they are good reminders to us that should be good shepherds to each other – parents to their children, neighbors to each other, and Catholics among other Catholics. Do we feed and tend to each other? May the risen Jesus, who feeds us with His own flesh and blood, help us to be good shepherds to each other so that we might all live a mature life of faith in God.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

St. Peter – "We must obey God rather than men."

St. Peter, who was entrusted with the important task of feeding and tending the Lord's flock, knows His priorities. As good as it is to obey legitimate human authority, the obedience we should give to God is all the more good. Because whose voice and whose word matters more, the voice and the word of God, or the voice and the word of human beings? Only one voice and only one word have eternal consequences. The voice and the word of God should be obeyed over and above the obedience we might give to legitimate human authority. If human authority contradicts what God has said, then St. Peter's words should be the rule for us, too: "*We must obey God rather than men.*" We must be very clear: the authority of humanity is NOT higher than the authority of God. If everyone else says something is right, and God says it's wrong, then God has the final say, regardless of what is said by others or how many times it's said or by how many people it's said. We have grown too comfortable allowing human authority to overshadow the authority of God. For example, as Catholics, the ideal for us is Mass attendance once a week, as an expression of our love of God. If certain people think that it's OK to only go once a month, or twice a year, or once a year, or not at all, that doesn't make it OK. By divine decree, we should follow the third commandment: remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. For Christians, the Sabbath day, the day of rest, is Sunday, the day of the Lord's resurrection. This isn't about rules. This is about listening to the voice of God. This is about allowing God to be God over our lives. This is about God having the place He deserves as our Creator, as the One who breathed life into our souls, as the One who sustains us every day. To whom do you listen? Whom do you obey? Human beings, or God?

Sunday April 24th, 2022

2nd Sunday of Easter (aka Sunday of Divine Mercy), Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

In this weekend's Gospel, Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on the disciples and gives them the power of forgiving and retaining sins. They are meant to be instruments of divine mercy, offering to sinners the forgiveness which Jesus Himself so often showed. They are meant to act in the person of Christ. Priests do this in the sacrament of reconciliation when they speak in the first person and say to penitents, "*...I absolve you of your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*" The priest's power to forgive sins comes from God. In his humanity, no priest has the power or authority to forgive sins; but through his ordination, every priest is made Christ's delegate, His ambassador, empowered to act on His behalf and in His power and with His authority. This power to forgive sins and remit their punishment is reserved to priests. But nonetheless we all become more like God through acts of forgiveness.

In St. Luke's Gospel, Jesus says, "*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful,*" (Luke 6:36). We can do that by putting into practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy (more on that below). By becoming more merciful, we become more like God. As the old saying goes, "*To err is human, to forgive is divine.*" As we learn to forgive and show mercy, the image of God

grows within us and our likeness to Him is increased. God knows that what heals the world is not judgment but mercy. Judgment happens for those who have not shown mercy. To the extent that we forgive others or ask for forgiveness, we promote healing and reconciliation. To the extent that we are too prideful to offer forgiveness or ask for it, the wounds inflicted upon us or which we've inflicted upon others do not heal but only grow worse. Let's pray this weekend that we might become more and more like God by becoming more and more merciful.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy

The Church has forth lists of the works of mercy, some known as the Corporal Works and others known as Spiritual Works. As the name implies, the Corporal Works are of a more physical nature, while the Spiritual Works are of a more intangible and spiritual nature. The Corporal Works of Mercy are the following: 1) to feed the hungry, 2) to give drink to the thirsty, 3) to clothe the naked, 4) shelter the homeless, 5) to visit the sick, 6), to visit the imprisoned, and 7) to bury the dead. The Spiritual Works of Mercy are the following: 1) to counsel the doubtful, 2) to instruct the ignorant, 3) to admonish sinners, 4) to comfort the afflicted, 5) to forgive offenses, 6) to bear wrongs patiently, and 7) to pray for the living and the dead. These Works of Mercy are listed for Christians to be able to think about them and then find ways to put them into practice. How much does our world need each of these Works of Mercy? Probably a whole lot! The world we live in is in desperate need of divine mercy. By practicing the Works of Mercy, we can become people of mercy and then, through God at work in us and through us, we can become instruments of God's healing in the world. The essential message of this Sunday of Divine Mercy is that we receive mercy from God through Jesus and the forgiveness of sins we have in His name; and then that we become merciful to others, like He is to us. In this way, we are healed; and we become a source of healing for others. Mercy is medicine for a sick world. The divine mercy flowing from the pierced Heart of Jesus is that which can cleanse and heal the world. Are you able to put into practice the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy? Who among you is sick and needs a visit? Who among you do you need to forgive or admonish? Through these good works, may the world be healed by God's divine mercy.

Sunday April 17th, 2022

Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

Happy Easter! We are privileged today to celebrate the joy of the Lord's resurrection from the dead. Alleluia! Just as new life is bursting forth around us in this spring season, new life also springs forth from the grave. Jesus, the risen Lord of life, has conquered the power of sin and death. Death couldn't hold Him. The grave couldn't keep Him. He had to rise from the dead.

And He had to appear to His disciples as having been raised to new life, as more powerful than death, as the victor over the grave. The resurrection is the great work of God. Christian tradition has often lovingly referred to Easter Sunday as the 8th day, the day of the new creation. God, who said, *“Let there be light,”* has shown forth His new light upon us in the resurrection of His only begotten Son. In the resurrection, the old order of creation is made new, humanity is forgiven and redeemed, and God’s light triumphs over evil’s darkness.

St. Peter’s preaching states well the significance of the resurrection for us: *“This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead. He commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that He is the One appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins through His name.”* We are the modern recipients of the joyful news of the Lord’s resurrection. And we are called to be joyful in the news of a world redeemed by a love so great that it was willing to endure death, even death on a cross. The resurrection is the triumph of the love of God. Today, let’s simply rejoice in the triumph of this great love. Let’s be joyful in the resurrection of Jesus, the Lord of LIFE!

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

The Mystery of God Revealed

If God didn’t reveal Himself, we would have no knowledge of Him. We would not know anything about His goodness, His kindness, His mercy, His love, or His grace. But as it is, God has desired to make Himself known to us. It started in the pages of the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, as God revealed Himself to the select few whom He had chosen. Old Testament figures like Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David help us understand God by how He revealed Himself to these chosen souls. And there are numerous prophecies contained within the Old Testament, some of which are fulfilled within the Old Testament, but others are so grand (e.g. the Song of the Suffering Servant, see Isaiah 52:13-53:12, the first reading for Good Friday) that they can only be fulfilled by a person or an event equally as grand. As Catholics, we believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of these grand prophecies. His life, given to us in the Gospels, explains how He fulfilled the prophecies of old. In and through Jesus, we have the full revelation of God. Jesus revealed the human face of God and the divine face of humanity. In Jesus, God and humanity meet and coexist in a perfect union. Jesus is God made man; He also represents humanity caught up into communion with God. He is the eternal Son of God the Father who, by His conception and birth, shared our human nature in all things but sin, and showed us how God wants to meet us and draw us to Himself. To get to know Jesus, I recommend that you do two things: 1) read the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to come to know Jesus’ life story, and 2) consider watching the TV series, *The Chosen*, in order to see an artistic portrayal of the Gospel by dedicated actors who love their faith. The more we come to know Jesus, the Son of God, the more the mystery of God will be revealed to us. May this Easter season help you come to know the mystery of God revealed for us in and through Jesus, God’s own Son.

Sunday April 10th, 2022

Palm Sunday of Passion of the Lord, Year C

Dear Pastorate family,

This weekend, before every Mass, we recall the Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem by means of procession into church to recall Jesus' procession into Jerusalem. But by the week will end Jesus will be condemned to death, scourged, crucified between two criminals, laid in the tomb, but will be raised to new life on Easter Sunday morning. This account of the Lord's passion from Luke's Gospel gives us three of Jesus' seven last words from the cross (as recorded in all four Gospels). They are 1) "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (see Luke 23:34), 2) "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise" (see Luke 23:43), and 3) "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (see Luke 23:46). These are excellent words to pray with during this Holy Week. The goal during Holy Week is to spiritually unite ourselves to Jesus so as to suffer with Him, die with Him, and then rise with Him. If we do that, Easter will be about our own resurrection, too.

We also begin the Divine Mercy novena on Good Friday in anticipation of the Sunday of Divine Mercy, the Sunday after Easter. The novena is included as an insert in this weekend's bulletin. Praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet during Holy Week would also be good. Please come to the special liturgies of the sacred Paschal Triduum – the evening Mass for Holy Thursday and adoration afterward, the afternoon Good Friday liturgy, the Easter Vigil (roughly an hour and a half long), and of course Easter Sunday Masses. Fr. Antony Waget, from Divine Word College, will celebrate the 8 a.m. Easter Sunday Mass in Rickardsville and the 10 a.m. Easter Sunday Mass in Holy Cross, and I'll have the 8 a.m. Mass in Luxemburg and the 10 a.m. Mass in Balltown. During this final week of Lent, may we be spiritually united with Jesus and experience the new life He offers us in His resurrection.

God bless,

Fr. Diehm

Praying with the Seven Last Words of Jesus from the Cross

1) "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34) – Jesus, You have forgiven me, and now I ask, who are You asking me to forgive? Give me the grace to truly forgive others. 2) "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43) – Jesus, You offer me the hope of heaven. Please show me how I can share this hope with those around me. 3) "Woman, behold, your son....Behold, your mother." (John 19:26–27) – Jesus, you entrusted Mary to me as a spiritual mother. Holy Mary, my mother, please help me follow Jesus your Son to the cross and to the new life of the resurrection. 4) "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34) – Lord Jesus, when I feel forsaken by God, help

me to remember that You experienced God-forsakenness so that I might know God never forsakes me. 5) “I thirst.” (John 19:28) – Jesus, You thirst, and I know You thirst for me and for my love. Help me love You more now to make up for all the times I’ve been indifferent to Your thirst. 6) “It is finished.” (John 19:30) – Jesus, Your work of redemption was completed upon the cross, but it still remains for me to participate in Your great work. Give me the courage to suffer with you for my salvation and the salvation of the world. 7) “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46) – Jesus, You had complete trust in the Father’s love and care for You. Help me to give my life over to God, trusting that He will love me and care for me through every stage of life.

Sunday April 3rd, 2022
5th Sunday of Lent, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

This weekend’s Gospel about the woman caught in adultery from the Gospel of John is quite profound. Of course, it’s sinful that the woman committed adultery. But it’s also sinful that the people – the scribes and Pharisees – who caught her in the act wanted to use her as a means by which to ensnare Jesus. Jesus, in His usual masterful wisdom, offers the perfect response that both convicts the scribes and Pharisees and shows mercy to the woman – “*Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.*” All of the scribes and Pharisees had to acknowledge themselves as sinners, and so Jesus’ masterful response left them unable to carry out their evil intentions, whether toward Jesus or toward the woman. All that was left was to show the woman the mercy of God.

Friends, how often have we been ready to metaphorically pick up and stones and hurl them at someone? Perhaps because of a person’s politics that we don’t like, or because of some injustice that was committed against us, or just because we thought it was the right course of action? If we’re honest with ourselves, we’d have to admit that we’ve been ready to place ourselves among the scribes and Pharisees all too often. But throwing stones at people doesn’t (and can’t) solve the world’s problems. What solves the world’s problems is mercy. What solves the world’s problems is overcoming violence through forgiveness. This is the “high road” which Jesus in the Gospel calls us to take – to turn the other cheek, to go the extra mile, to love our enemies, to pray for those who mistreat us. The strict nature of the law has been fulfilled in the leniency of grace. And as we have received mercy from God, so we are called to show mercy to others. This is the way of the kingdom of God. How have you experienced the mercy of God? How does recognizing your own sinfulness help you show mercy to others? Let’s always lay down our stones!

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

“I consider everything as a loss...”

St. Paul is excellent at describing the “mental shift” that needs to happen among those who want to live a sincerely faithful life. When St. Paul gave up his way of life as a Pharisee to embrace faith in Jesus, he needed to change how he looked at the world. He said in this weekend’s second reading to the Philippians, *“I consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him...”* What kind of “good” is knowing Christ? As St. Paul says, it’s a supreme good. It’s the highest good, better than all other “goods” – better than life, happiness in this world, a successful career, etc. In his conversion, St. Paul was taken hold of by the Lord. He came to know the Lord in a powerful way, and his faith in Jesus seized his heart and he was forever changed. He came to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior, the One sent from God. As a consequence of that, he gave up his old way of life in order to become a disciple of the risen Jesus and an apostle. The reading closes with this sentiment: *“Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God’s upward calling, in Christ Jesus.”* Do you suppose St. Paul’s life was just exceptional? That this sort of change of mind and heart was just meant for him and not for others? Is it meant for us, too? Indeed, I think it is. God wants to change all of our lives for the better. His work is one of transformation. He turns sinners into Saints. He turns fishermen into disciples. He turns a persecutor of Christians into a champion of the faith. Friends, God wants to accomplish a great work in our lives like the great work He accomplished in the life of St. Paul. He wasn’t exceptional, just an exemplar, just an example of what transformation can look like. May God continue to transform our hearts and minds.

Sunday March 27th, 2022

4th Sunday of Lent, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

I’m beyond delighted to hear the Parable of the Prodigal Son proclaimed in this weekend’s Gospel. It’s a masterpiece of teaching on God’s relationship with humanity in so many ways. First, some context: *“Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus...”* Jesus was drawing a crowd, and they were largely social outcasts, but in Jesus, they found a sense of welcome. And next, *“...but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’”* There are critics everywhere, and Jesus had His critics, too. And it’s to these critics, then, that Jesus addressed the parable of the prodigal son. The parable begins, *“A man had two sons...”* The “man” represents God, and the two sons represent, conversely, the tax collectors and sinners (represented by the younger son) and the Pharisees and scribes (represented by the older son).

The younger son wanted to be free of his father's influence, and so asked for his share of the inheritance and left his father's house. Eventually, when he hit rock bottom, he came to his senses and returned. That was happening with the tax collectors and sinners. They were returning to God. But the Pharisees and scribes objected. They behaved like the older son in the parable who thought of his father as his master and didn't see himself as a son. Both sons need to understand the fatherly nature of God and God's desire to see all people as His beloved children. Both sons stand in need of conversion. The same is true of us. Few of us really grasp how TRULY GOOD God is. We think of God as a ruler or judge, but probably not enough as a loving Father. This parable is meant to help change our perspective about God. The Pharisees and scribes should rejoice when God's "lost" children return. The Pharisees and scribes likewise need to see themselves as God's beloved children and not just servants. We all need to do the same with God – God welcomes each of us to come home; we are each beloved by Him.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

Be Reconciled to God!

St. Paul has a wonderful message in this weekend's second reading (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). Speaking about how God reconciled the world to Himself through the death of Jesus, His Son, St. Paul passionately exhorts the Christians living in Corinth, Greece: "*We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*" Sometimes it happens that at the end of a person's life, they feel the need to "get right with God." It's unfortunate that it sometimes takes the prospect of imminent death for a person to address their relationship with God. Don't get me wrong, it's good that it happens, but it's just unfortunate that it happened only near the end of life. The better approach would be to "get right with God" whenever it happens that our relationship with God is either damaged (because of venial sin) or destroyed (because of mortal sin). St. Paul's exhortation is that God has achieved the possibility of reconciliation, but it's still possible for people to reject this reconciliation. I genuinely fear for the salvation of anyone who wants to go to heaven but who does nothing practically to foster their relationship with God. They don't pray. They don't come to Mass. They don't care about the poor. They don't read their Bible. How can we have a relationship with God if we don't do the things which help build that relationship? The SCARIEST WORDS IN THE BIBLE are the words, "*I never knew you, depart from me, you evildoers,*" (see Matthew 7:21-23). It's not enough to call upon the Lord. We have to live what we believe. And when we don't live what we believe, it's then, especially, that we need to be reconciled to God. I know reconciliation isn't fun, but it's good for your soul. Examine your conscience. In what ways have your thoughts, words, actions, or lack of action damaged or destroyed your relationship with God? How have you been wounded by your own sinfulness? How do you need God's healing grace in reconciliation? This Lent, focus on getting right with God. Don't put it off.

Sunday March 20th, 2022

3rd Sunday of Lent, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

In this weekend's Gospel, Jesus uses two recent news events to illustrate two important points: 1) that the people to whom these bad things happened weren't worse than others, and 2) unless we repent, the same fate may befall us. It's a common affliction among people to think, "*That sort of thing won't happen to me.*" But the people to whom bad things happen likely thought the same thing. I remember being instructed in seminary, when I heard the news about a priest leaving the priesthood, "*Don't think it can't happen to you.*" What's the point? If it can happen to other people, it can (and may) also happen to me. None of us are immune from bad things. And Jesus' deeper point is about the need for repentance. We need repentance, not just because we hope to avoid bad things happening to us, but more importantly, because we know that our repentance is pleasing to God.

Lent is traditionally a time for repentance and turning away from sin. At Ash Wednesday Masses this year, as everyone received ashes on their foreheads, they heard the words, "*Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.*" The other option to say when distributing ashes is, "*Repent, and believe in the Gospel.*" Scripture records that John the Baptist and Jesus both begin their public preaching with a call to repentance (Matthew 3:2 and Matthew 4:17, respectively). The need for repentance is universally recognized as necessary for salvation. Without repentance for the corrupting influence of sin, there is little hope of gaining the eternal happiness of heaven. Lent is a great time for us to consider our own need for repentance. What sins do we consistently fall into that we need to turn away from? How is God calling us to change our lives? May God give each of us the grace in this holy season to repent and reform our lives so that we might become more and more heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

Moses, the Burning Bush, and the Name of God

Our first reading (Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15) gives us the call of Moses in His encounter with the burning bush. That must have been quite a sight, to see a bush on fire, but not consumed by the fire. God called to Moses from a mountain known as Horeb. In biblical theology, mountains are places of encounter with God and revelation, so it's no surprise this encounter happens on a mountain. God called to Moses and told him that He has taken note of His people's slavery and willed to lead them out of slavery and wants to use Moses to achieve that deliverance. Moses asks God His name, and God responds by saying, "*I am who am.*" In Hebrew, this revelation of the name of God is only four letters, YHWH (known as the Tetragrammaton). Out of reverence for the Jewish people and the sacred nature of the divine name, Catholics DO NOT use it either in prayer or in song. Again, in biblical theology, to know someone's name is to have some degree of control or power over them. God gives a name that identifies Him, but is still elusive. In other words, the Jewish people came to know the name of God, and yet still had no power over Him. FYI, Jesus claimed this divine name ("I AM") for Himself in the passion of St. John's

Gospel (see John 18:4-8). And when asked about the resurrection, Jesus also pointed back to this passage as a defense that God is not God of the dead, but of the living, being the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob (see Luke 20:27-40, Mark 12:18-27, and Matthew 22:23-33). What's the significance of this passage for us? God knows our plight. Our struggles are not hidden from Him. He clearly doesn't appear to us in a burning bush, but He does come to us in the Eucharist, and invites us to become spiritually "on fire" with love for Him, yet not consumed. May God continue to "ignite" us such that we show forth His holy presence living within us. May we all become like the burning bush.

Sunday March 13th, 2022
2nd Sunday of Lent, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

St. Paul declares in the second reading this weekend, "*...our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our lowly body to conform with His glorified body by the power that enables Him also to bring all things into subjection to himself.*" The promise of a changed body that conforms with Jesus' glorified body is the essence of the Catholic belief in the resurrection of the dead. During this life, our bodies become old and fragile and they don't work as well as they should. And eventually, death comes for each of us. But at the right moment, when God so determines, those who died in a state of friendship with God will be called forth to new life in the resurrection, and their body will become like the risen body of Jesus.

The Gospel account of the Lord's transfiguration on mount Tabor foreshadows the glory of the resurrection. As the account relates, "*...two men were conversing with Him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.*" The law and the prophets bear witness to Jesus. Before He would take on the glory of the resurrection, Jesus would accomplish an "exodus" – a deliverance from the power of sin and death through a sacrificial lamb. Jesus would become the sacrificial lamb, like the first exodus out of Egypt, and His blood would deliver all people from their slavery to sin and death. And during this luminous event of the Transfiguration, the voice of God the Father was heard, "*This is my chosen Son; listen to Him.*" The disciples are meant to be confirmed in their faith, prepared for all that would still transpire in the events of the Lord's passion and death. They are meant to understand that the "scandal" of the cross leads ultimately to victory over death. We, too, can be encouraged that death and the cross, though terrible, is not the end of the story.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

The Promise Made to Abraham

Consider the first reading this weekend. The first lines from the reading say, “*The Lord God took Abram outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so,” he added, “shall your descendants be.” Abram put his faith in the Lord, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness.*” We take it for granted, but it wasn’t actually nighttime, when the stars are visible, when God made the promise to Abram. Later on in the reading, we get the detail that the sun had set and it was dark. But when God made the promise to Abram, it was daylight, and the stars couldn’t be seen. And yet Abram believed God, and that faith was credited to Abram as righteousness. It sometimes happens that God makes promises, and the context in which we receive them makes putting our faith in God difficult. Do we still believe in the promises of God, even when we can’t see how they might be fulfilled? Do we believe only when it’s convenient? Do we have faith only when doing so makes sense? Can we still have faith, even in the midst of hardship and pain and suffering and when it seems that God is not paying attention to our prayers? Friends, that is when faith is the most meaningful. It’s easy to believe when the object of our faith is visible and understood. But what of those times when we can’t see and when we don’t understand? That’s the test of faith. Abram (Abraham) was a friend of God, because He believed that God could be trusted, that God could be believed, even when it didn’t “make sense.” We, too, are called to be friends of God, especially when believing in God is hard. God has proven Himself time and time again to be faithful. He is unchanging. He has been faithful to His word in the past, and He will be faithful to His word now. All we have to do is put our faith in God, and we will prove ourselves to be true spiritual descendants of Abram; and it will likewise be credited to us as righteousness.

Sunday March 6th, 2022

1st Sunday of Lent, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

The first Sunday of Lent is always the account of Jesus’ temptation in the desert by Satan. Let’s resist the temptation (pun intended?) to dismiss Satan as a metaphorical figure or a literary device. Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition have consistently spoken of the fallen angel known as Satan in real, personal terms. Our faith teaches that we do indeed have a spiritual enemy, directly opposed to our good, and both Scripture and Tradition sees this enemy personified in Satan and the angels who, with him, fell from grace (see Revelation 12:3-4a). Satan is a fallen angel – a demon, or an evil spirit – and his entire purpose is to drag human beings away in his own rebellion against God so that they, too, might become children of hell rather than children of God.

The Lord’s temptation in the desert was especially tailored to Him. Notice how Satan attacks His identity – “*IF you are the Son of God...*” Satan tries to get Jesus to prove His identity. But such proof is unnecessary. God knows who we are, and if we know who we are, then we don’t need to prove our identity to anyone else. Satan likewise attacks our identity, tempting us to

think that we are NOT children of God. But if we know who we are, and if we know who our Father is, then the enemy's temptations will have little effect. As we enter Lent, expect temptation. It will happen. And have a game plan in mind for how to respond. Like he did with Jesus, Satan will tailor his temptations to you, too. He regularly attacks our weakest point. Maybe that's our hope, or our sense of self-worth, or our way of thinking, or whatever else. Wherever you're weakest is where Satan attacks. So expect temptation there. And respond with the word of God. Pray psalm 23, or 91. Pray the prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel. Like Jesus, we, too, can learn how to resist the devil's insidious temptations with the help of God.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

The Spiritual Warfare of Lent

If you read "spiritual warfare" and get turned off, I get it. Warfare is ugly business. It should be avoided whenever and wherever possible. But this is not traditional warfare involving guns and tanks. This is spiritual warfare. It's different, and unfortunately it's necessary. It's necessary because we have an unjust aggressor – the evil one – who wages war against us. If we don't want to be toppled by this unjust aggressor, then we have to stand our ground. Most of our spiritual "warfare" will be defensive, defending ourselves from his assaults. And only occasionally will it be offensive, especially in regard to loved ones and the evil one's attacks on them. Our weapons in this warfare are likewise spiritual – the grace we receive in the sacraments, holy water, the crucifix, special prayers, the Precious Blood of Jesus, the intercession of the Saints, and so much more. If you want a good, basic introduction to the Catholic idea of spiritual warfare, I'd recommend the book, "The Catholic Warrior" by Robert Abel (see www.catholicwarriors.com). More important than knowing our enemy in this battle is the task of knowing our ally – and our ally is none other than the Lord God – the most Holy Trinity – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This Lent, try to draw as close to God as you possibly can. Practice the disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Try to love God and love your neighbor with your whole heart. Pray for the conversion of others. Fast for peace in the world. Give alms to the poor and the needy through trusted Catholic organizations. Use the disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to help shield you from the attacks of the evil one. The more you become a Saint, the better defended you'll be from spiritual attacks. And if with every spiritual attack you turn to God, the enemy has an incentive to tempt you less. Ask God to strengthen those places where you feel weak. And make God your refuge and your strength in this spiritual struggle. With Almighty God on our side, we can experience victory in every spiritual battle!

Sunday February 27th, 2022
8th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

You've heard me speak about discipleship before. I've tried to make it a staple of my preaching and writing, because we're all called to live as disciples of the Lord Jesus. Our mission statement, always on the cover of the bulletin, reads: "*Our mission: to form intentional disciples of Jesus Christ.*" This weekend's Gospel directly addresses the issue of discipleship. Jesus says, "*No disciple is superior to the teacher; but when fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher.*" And who is our teacher? None other than Jesus. And who are His disciples? Ideally, you and me. As Jesus says, the fully trained disciple will become like his or her teacher. As I preached on last weekend, God sets the bar high for us so that we might strive to attain it. He does so in order that His own image and likeness might shine forth from within us. His will is that we begin to look more and more like Him.

This is God's great work within us. He is the Potter, and we are the clay (see Jeremiah 18:1-6). How many times have we spoken words that have been harsh, hurtful, mean, or derogatory? How many times have we allowed anger, resentment, fear, and unforgiveness to get the better of us? God's work is one of transformation. He takes a persecutor of Christians and turns him into a champion of the faith (St. Paul). He takes a fisherman and turns him into a true fisher of men (St. Peter). He takes bread and wine and turns it into the Body and Blood of Christ. God can transform us, too, if we let Him. God can transform our life and make it into a reflection of the life of Christ, a reflection of His love, mercy, wisdom, and grace. In order to reform the world, we start by reforming ourselves (with the help of God). Only then are we in a position to bring about positive change in the lives of others.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

The Death of the Old, the Birth of the New

This week Wednesday March 2nd marks the beginning of Lent with Ash Wednesday. Lent is a time of purification, reformation, repentance, and preparation. In His infinite wisdom, God knows that in order to bring about "the new," that which is old must die. St. Paul, for instance, "died" to his old way of life as a Pharisee in order to embrace his new way of life as an Apostle and a disciple of the risen Lord. The "old man" within us must die in order for the "new man" to be born. St. Paul says, "*So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come,*" (2 Corinthians 5:17). As one example, perhaps at times we've been pleased to notice the faults of others but we've overlooked our own faults. Jesus says in this weekend's Gospel, "*Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove that splinter in your eye,' when you do not even notice the wooden beam in your own eye? You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye.*" What's Jesus' point? The faults of others may be a trifle when compared with our own faults. And it will do neither them nor us any good if we try to change another without first doing what we need to change ourselves. Let's be slow to point out the faults of others and quick to recognize our own faults. In that way, our lives will begin to change and we may begin to bear the "good fruit" Jesus also spoke about at the end of this

weekend's Gospel. Let's die to our old ways of finding fault with others and embrace the new way of life of honesty and growing in virtue. As Lent approaches, consider how the "old" within us needs to die so that what is new in Christ may come to life!

Sunday February 20th, 2022

7th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

Do you ever hear a teaching of Jesus that hits you like a punch to the gut? If we're really listening to what Jesus says, that's probably how His teaching in this weekend's Gospel should hit us. Consider the first few lines from this reading – *"...love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."* If those words don't hit you like a punch to the gut, you likely aren't taking them very seriously. Do you suppose these words are optional? Do you suppose we can just dismiss them and say, "I don't need to do that"? When the Son of God gives His disciples instructions like those, they should be considered the norm for how the disciples of Jesus conduct themselves. We don't dish out an eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth, but we're called to the imitation of God. And how about the last line as a wake-up call for how we treat others? *"For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you."* Sobering words!

Friends, the Gospel challenges us. It's meant to make us uncomfortable, to shake us free of the deadly lethargy which threatens our spiritual growth, and to call us into more than we think we're capable of attaining. God sets a high standard so that we might strive to attain it. No greatness was ever achieved through a mediocre effort. We're called to strive for God's standard, so that we might achieve true greatness, the greatness of the Saints. How do we become Saints? God's grace enables Christian men and women – the disciples of Jesus – to attain God's high standard of living. And how do we receive God's grace? Through prayer, through participation in the sacraments, and through the practice of real virtue. God's grace builds on what we offer Him. So, offer Him your real effort to practice what Jesus teaches; offer Him your sacrifices; and then see what happens.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

For Your Information

Away on retreat – this week, I will be away on retreat. I'll be staying at the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton parish rectory in Hiawatha and praying there and at other parishes in Marion and Cedar Rapids. I'll be gone starting Sunday night, Feb. 20th, and will return on Friday Feb. 25th. During that time, daily Masses in the pastorate will be cancelled. Mass intentions will be rescheduled.

I'm sorry if this causes any inconvenience. We priests are supposed to take an annual retreat, and my last retreat was February of 2021. I look forward to being away on retreat.

Ash Wednesday Masses – Lent is fast approaching! Ash Wednesday will be on Wednesday March 2nd (one week from this coming Wednesday) and Masses will be celebrated at 10 a.m. in Holy Cross, 5:15 p.m. in Rickardsville, and 7:15 p.m. in Sherrill. Ash Wednesday is a day of fasting and abstinence. What we eat throughout the day should be the equivalent of one full meal and we should abstain from eating meat. We also abstain from eating meat on all the Fridays of Lent. And while it's typical to think of giving up something for Lent, it makes little sense if you then splurge on that thing when Lent is over. It would be better to think of taking up a spiritual discipline that you could keep practicing even after Lent ends. Lent is NOT the Catholic version of self-help program. It is a season in which we're called to discipline our unruly desires and grow in our love of God and love of neighbor.

Pastorate Mission During Holy Week – Save the date! Jon Leonetti, popular Catholic speaker and author, will be our presenter for a Pastorate Mission on Sunday and Monday of Holy Week, April 10th and 11th. I've known Jon for quite a few years, and most recently accompanied him on a pilgrimage to Rome in September of 2019. I'd be very happy to see a large turnout for our mission. There will be a free will offering connected to attending the mission to help offset the cost of book Jon to come speak to our pastorate. So plan to attend our two-night Mission!

Sunday February 13th, 2022

6th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

We're accustomed to hearing the Beatitudes found in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 5:3-12). Luke also gives us the Beatitudes, just in a slightly different format. In Matthew, it's a series of eight statements of blessing, but in Luke, there are four statements of blessing and four statements of woe. There are similarities and differences between the two sets, and it's good that we have both. In Luke's Beatitudes, the statements of blessing and woe are paired – the first blessing corresponds to the first woe, and so on. What are we meant to understand about the Beatitudes? As with so many of Jesus' teachings, He takes the wisdom of the world and flips it on its head.

We would think the states of life described in the "woes" would be more desirable – to be rich, filled, laughing, and spoken well of by others. But Jesus says "woe" to those living in those circumstances. Likewise, those states of life in the "blessings" would be considered less desirable – to be poor, hungry, weeping, and hated. But Jesus calls "blessed" those living in those circumstances. It's a conundrum. Perhaps the sentiments of the "full version" of the Serenity Prayer can be enlightening – *"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time, accepting hardship as the pathway to peace."*

Taking as Jesus did this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it. Trusting that You will make all things right if I surrender to Your will. So that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You forever in the next.” We hope to be reasonably happy in this life. Supreme happiness is for the life of the world to come. Can we learn to call “blessed” those whom Jesus calls blessed?

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

The Archdiocesan Survey

This week you should have received or you will soon receive in the mail a physical copy of a survey put together by the Archdiocese of Dubuque. As the introduction to the survey by the Archbishop relates, this survey will be a help to a pastoral planning process which will be carried on throughout the 30 counties within the Archdiocese of Dubuque in northeast Iowa. Here are some statistics before about the Archdiocese: we have 74 active priests serving 165 parishes for a total Catholic population of 185,260 (as of October 2021). The number of priests relative to the number of parishes and the Catholic population reminds us that we need to be good stewards of our resources so that 1) Catholics can be helped to live as intentional disciples of Jesus, and so that 2) priests don’t “burn out” in the course of ministry. So it’s important that WE ALL DO OUR PART to fill out the survey, online if at all possible. As we think about our own pastorate territory, I have no crystal ball and can’t tell you what the future holds. But I know that if we want to keep what we have, it is our responsibility to support our local parish, not just in order to keep it open, but to continue to allow it to be a sacred place where we are nourished by the Word of God and strengthened by the Sacraments. So what do we need to do? 1) Fill out the survey, 2) continue to invite inactive Catholics to return to the practice of their faith (repeatedly), 3) energize and invite the youth of our parish to be an active part of parish life, 4) live your faith, not just by coming to Mass, but by the practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, and 5) generously support your parish with your contributions to help its financial solvency. We may know what makes for a healthy parish, but knowing is only a piece of what’s needed. Implementing what makes for a healthy parish is the battle. ARE YOU WILLING TO DO YOUR PART?

Sunday February 6th, 2022
5th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

The call of Simon (St. Peter) to be a fisher of men is a favorite Bible passage (I know, I have a lot of favorite passages). The layers of meaning are many. First, Jesus gets into Simon’s boat. Simon’s boat has been used as an image of the Church. Jesus being in Simon’s boat can be symbolic of Jesus’ presence within His Church. Jesus tells Simon to put out into deep water and

lower his nets for a catch. The “deep water” can symbolize the call to not stay at superficial levels, but to be willing to “go deep” with God because it’s then that we grow spiritually. Simon’s reluctance but willingness to follow Jesus’ commands corresponds to our own human way of thinking and our need to listen not just to our own logic, but the divine logic that at times feels counter-intuitive. The great catch of fish represents the reward of being obedient to the voice of God, subjecting our own human will to the divine will, and that when we place our will at the service of the will of God, great things can happen.

Next, Simon acknowledges his sinfulness before the Lord. Whereas previously he addressed Jesus as “Master,” now he addresses Him as “Lord,” signifying that Simon has come to understand Jesus’ true identity as God and not just a great prophet or teacher. Although the Lord is aware of Simon’s sinfulness, He doesn’t see it as an obstacle to Simon becoming a “fisher of men,” someone who will draw others into the kingdom of God. As a result of this encounter, Simon, James, and John leave everything behind and follow Jesus. This is the “awakening” God wants to bring about in all of our lives, such that we leave old ways behind and follow the new way of life which Jesus calls us to embrace. Ultimately, this is a passage about disciples and for disciples. How does this passage speak to YOU? How might the Lord be likewise calling YOU to put out into deep water?

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

“Put out into deep water...”

The great masters of the spiritual life throughout the history of the Church have known well that there is no such thing as “staying put” when it comes to a person’s relationship with God. Either we are moving forward, or we are falling behind. There is no standing still. The goal of the spiritual life is to keep moving forward. That’s how we grow. We keep praying, we keep coming to Mass, we keep persevering, or we will lose what ground we’ve gained. Think of soldiers on the field of battle. Would it ever make sense for a soldier or a platoon of soldiers to think they can set up camp and not advance any further? No, the soldier who doesn’t want to advance the cause for which they are fighting is not a good soldier. In the same way, the Christian who doesn’t want to advance in the spiritual life isn’t really a good Christian. But I get why in both cases someone wouldn’t want to advance. What awaits them? Will there be hardship ahead? What will come their way? They think maybe they’ll be safe if they stay still. But neither the soldier nor the Christian can remain still and comfortable, though that might be the temptation. Both the soldier and the Christian need to remember that they are part of something bigger than themselves. The soldier fights for the cause of justice and freedom, and the Christian fights for the salvation of souls, his or her own and those of others. God calls us to put out into deep water, to go beyond our comfort zone, because that is where growth happens. YOU are called to put out into deep water. Be courageous in making Mass attendance a priority. Be courageous in speaking about your faith to others. Be courageous in calling others to conversion. Be courageous in speaking the truth with love. Our faith grows by being shared, but it shrinks by staying comfortable. Be courageous. Put out into deep water.

Sunday January 30th, 2022
4th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

The word of God is welcome among us when it comforts us, but is it still welcome when it challenges us and calls us to change how we live? People were amazed at the gracious words that came from Jesus' mouth when it sounded nice, but when He spoke a word that challenged them, the sentiments of the people changed dramatically. The people went from being amazed at Jesus' gracious words to being infuriated with Him. Let's be honest: we human beings are fickle. And we are not so different from the people of Jesus' time. We love Jesus when what He says lines up with what we like. But we can become bitter and angry when His words challenge us. What needed to happen in the lives of the people in Jesus' time, and what needs to happen for us? Quite simply, conversion. Conversion is a change of mind and heart. It's a change of perspective, a new openness where there had previously been closed-mindedness.

God wants all of us to be people of love, the kind of love St. Paul wrote about in the second reading. Conversion helps that happen. It turns us from away from vindictiveness and toward forgiveness. It softens hearts makes them open to the word of God, even when that word challenges us and calls us to change. How does conversion happen? And how do we become people of love? It's a matter of cooperation between the Holy Spirit and our human spirit. The Holy Spirit inspires us and/or convicts us to change our ways, and either we listen and accept the Spirit's activity, or we close our heart and reject the Spirit's prompting. The decision is always ours. We can pray for conversion, for a change of heart and mind, so that we become more open to God, more inclined to listen to the voice of Jesus the Son, and more open to the inspiration and/or conviction of the Spirit. Let's pray for the grace of continued conversion in our lives.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

St. Paul's Praises of Love

The second reading is familiar to any of us who have ever attended a Catholic wedding. It is probably the single most popular second reading among all potential options for Catholic weddings. In this reading, St. Paul describes the true nature of love, the kind of love we all want to characterize our marriages and our lives. St. Paul says, "*Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.*" There are a lot of "not" statements here, so sometimes I've found it helpful to put forward the "positive" quality behind the "not" statement. So we can say that true love is: 1) trusting (not jealous), 2) humble (not pompous), 3) realistic or honest (not inflated), 4) courteous or thoughtful (not rude), 5) selfless (not seeking its own interests), 6) slow to get angry

(not quick-tempered), 7) ready to forgive (not brooding over injury), 8) rejoicing only in the truth (not in wrongdoing). A good check might be to ask ourselves: do these adjectives describe me and my life? Am I patient and kind, trusting and humble, and so on? These words should describe us, so that we might truly become people of love. On a deeper level, these words also describe who God is, because the Bible tells us, “*God is love.*” So we can truthfully say, “*God is patient, God is kind.*” God is all of these things toward us. Are we all of these things toward God? Are we all of these things toward others? If we are not these things, then why not? In what ways are we in need of deeper conversion? This weekend, use the second reading to make an examination of conscience and ask yourself if your life fits within the Biblical description of love. And then ask God to help you in the particular way in which you see yourself fall short of God’s vision of love. In this way, may we all grow in conversion, in becoming people of love.

Sunday January 23rd, 2022
3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

St. Luke tells us, “Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.” A lot of people were interested in recording the events that transpired in the life of Jesus. The eyewitnesses to such events – the apostles and Mary – also handed down the deeds and teachings of Jesus in verbal form to those who came to believe. St. Luke, too, decided to investigate everything and write it down in orderly sequence. Statements like the above from St. Luke help us believe the accuracy of the Gospel accounts. This Gospel is St. Luke’s investigative exposé. He’s done his research, and now he’s writing everything down so that others may benefit from his account.

Added to this is our belief in the “inspiration” of scripture, that the Holy Spirit aided the human author. St. John records Jesus as saying, “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name – he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.” (John 14:26) The composition of the Gospels was not primarily a human effort, but an effort led by the Holy Spirit working through the human authors. In the rest of the Gospel reading, Jesus is in His hometown reading a “mission statement” of the Messiah found in the Book of the prophet Isaiah. That passage from Isaiah serves both as a mission for Jesus and also as a mission for us who believe in Him. Like Him, we, too, are meant to bring glad tidings to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives, declare recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free. May these activities characterize our lives as believers in Jesus the Messiah.

God bless,

Fr. Diehm

The Mission of the Messiah is our Mission, too

The passage which Jesus reads from the book of the prophet Isaiah is found in Isaiah 61:1-2a – “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” Jesus is the Christ, meaning “anointed one.” In His humanity, He receives the anointing with the Spirit in order to fulfill a divine commission to do what the passage says. Jesus fulfilled that divine commission during the course of His earthly ministry, and now He calls members of His Body – the Church – to participate in that same mission. Why? Because the poor are still in our midst. Because people are still held captive to sin. Because there are still people who are spiritually blind and need their eyes opened to the truth of God. Because the oppressed still need to be set free, and God is still looking for those who will make each year acceptable to the Lord. How do we do this? We support our parish financially so that the parish – an entire community of believers – can help fulfill this mission through education, charitable outreach, and acts of love and service to others. We support Catholic charitable institutions which aim at making a difference for those negatively impacted by the various difficult circumstances of life. And each of us individually should try our best to be people who encourage, build up, and lead others to the hope we have in Jesus. This is what the world NEEDS us to be – Jesus’s followers, His disciples, are meant to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (see Matthew 5:13-16). This is our mission as Christians. Are we willing to fulfill this mission in our “corporate” identity as a parish, and in our individual identity as Christians? Let’s pray that Jesus may use each of us individually and all of us together as His hands and His feet to continue to fulfill His mission in the world.

Sunday January 16th, 2022

2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

As we return to Ordinary Time after the Christmas season, this weekend we’re presented with Jesus’ first public miracle – the changing of water into wine during the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee. One of the most interesting things here is the relationship between Jesus and Mary. This episode illustrates Jesus’ reluctance to perform special “favours” just because family asks. Nonetheless, it’s Jesus’ own mother who asks for His help by simply stating a problem – “*They have no wine.*” Jesus might come off as dismissive of Mary in response, but He ultimately exercises filial obedience and performs His first miracle simply because His mother asked Him to help. Mary, for her part, brings up the issue to her Son, and then allows Him to respond however He sees fit. This passage gives us Mary’s only “commandment” in scripture as she says to the servers, “*Do whatever He tells you.*”

Everything that follows is how the miracle unfolded. It's telling that in performing this miracle, Jesus chose to create not just any old wine, but wine of an exceptionally great quality. Here in St. John's Gospel, various miracles are referred to as "signs" – "*Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs at Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.*" What do we do when we "run out of wine" in life – when our patience runs short, when we feel like our faith is dried up, when our hope seems to be all gone? One thing we can and should do is go to Mary. She then takes the matter to Jesus, her divine Son. And because Jesus perfectly fulfills the 4th commandment, we can trust that our dilemma will be received favorably by Jesus when presented to Him by His mother. We can go "To Jesus through Mary" – a model of prayer recommended by many Saints and holy souls. And may Mary's commandment always be the guidance we follow during our pilgrimage through this life.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

True Devotion to Mary

Our devotion to or veneration of Mary is like that of the devotion or veneration we give to the Saints, though of a higher order because of her exalted vocation as the Mother of God. It is altogether different from the worship we owe to God. Nonetheless, we venerate Mary because of her vocation to be "Theotokos" – the "Mother of God" or the "God bearer." And all of the veneration which we might extend to Mary is entirely because of Jesus. Her title, "Mother of God," exists in order to preserve our belief in the divinity of Jesus. We venerate her because Jesus did so. We believe in her Immaculate Conception because we believe in the absolute freedom from sin of Jesus, her divine Son. St. Maximilian Kolbe is remembered as saying, "*Never be afraid of loving the Blessed Virgin too much. You can never love her more than Jesus did.*" We worship God alone, not Mary and not any of the Saints. We venerate the Saints, we ask for their help from heaven, but we only worship God. We may sing the praises of Mary's virtues, but even that is a heightened form of veneration, not worship. We can and should worship the Real Presence of Jesus in Holy Communion, the single most visible "sign" of God's presence in our midst. That's why we genuflect to the tabernacle. But when we speak about devotion to Mary, we speak about her humanity – she was 100% human. Jesus, her Son, as both the Son of God and the Son of Mary, is both 100% God and 100% human, though He is first of all a divine Person. Jesus deserves our worship as the Son of God, but Mary deserves our veneration as the one who bore the Son of God in her womb. Furthermore, by devotion to Mary, we better devote ourselves to Jesus as we follow her one and only "commandment," "*Do whatever He tells you.*" Do you think being devoted to Mary would help you be more devoted to Jesus, her Son? How do you exercise devotion to Mary? May the Blessed Virgin Mary help us always to do whatever Jesus says!

Sunday January 9th, 2022

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

This weekend we celebrate simultaneously the end of the Christmas season and the first Sunday of Ordinary Time. The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is a reminder for us of what God has done for us in baptism. Jesus had no need to be baptized; He was already the Father's beloved Son. But He was baptized for our sake, so that through Him, we might understand the great grace which God wishes to bestow on us. What happened to us in our baptism needs to be appreciated later in life as we make a mature, adult appraisal of our faith. St. Paul states the spiritual mystery of baptism very well in the second reading: *"When the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deed we had done but because of His mercy, He saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by His grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life."* What a beautiful statement!

What happened to Jesus at His baptism also happened to us spiritually. When we were baptized, the heavens were opened to us; the Holy Spirit descended upon us; and from heaven, God looked upon us as His beloved child. Jesus was baptized for our sake, to help us know the goodness and mercy of God. Do we still think God is "up there" judging us? Do we still think bad things come to us from God instead of from the evil one? Do we still think we can earn God's approval by "being good"? These are the thoughts of a spiritual child. God wants us to come to spiritual maturity. We are loved by Him. He is our Father. And He sent us His Son and His Spirit as a testament of His love for us. As we celebrate the baptism of the Lord, may we all come to know God's great love for us.

God bless,

Fr. Diehm

My dream for parents and their children....

I've baptized a lot of children. I've asked questions of a lot of parents (the questions addressed to parents in the ritual of baptism). I most want parents to realize that they've been entrusted with the awesome responsibility of raising children of God. Children do not belong to their parents. Every human being belongs to God as *"the Lord, the giver of life."* Every baptized child is a beloved child of God. I most want parents to raise their children in the faith, in one form or another. That starts at home, by praying as a family, by parents being the first teachers of their children in the way of faith, by parents making their home a place where the faith is known and lived and celebrated. If our Catholic Church in the big sense is to survive into the future, it will survive because parents choose to be and to live as Catholics and raise their children to be such as well. The Christian family is meant to be the "domestic church" – the church at home. Parents are meant to be the first teachers of their children, long before their children ever meet a Catholic school teacher or a Faith Formation catechist. My dream for parents and their children is that we see more and more our young families present at Mass on a regular basis, more children enrolled in our local Catholic school, or enrolled in our faith formation program. Our faith is good! Our faith helps us live as God wants us to live! Our faith

is what sustains us in the midst of hardship. On this feast of the Baptism of the Lord, may we encourage young families in our pastorate to bring their children to Mass. I want Catholics sitting in the pews to NEVER, EVER say a harsh word or to act cruelly toward a mother or father with children who are struggling to get their kids to behave. I want our parishes to be places where young families feel welcomed and celebrated and encouraged. Let's all do our part to invite young families to come to Mass, to help young families who might be struggling, and to remember that each and every person is a beloved child of God whom God calls into communion with Himself.

Sunday January 2nd, 2022

Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

Happy New Year! This weekend we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord, the feast of the “revelation” (Epiphany) of the Lord to the Gentiles represented by the magi, the wise men, who were possibly kings. We don't know exactly how many magi there were, but tradition has ascribed names to three of them – Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. The belief in the three is associated with the three gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The content of both the first reading and the responsorial psalm support the belief that these three were kings. This early revelation of the Lord to the Gentiles foreshadows the fulfillment of God's plan to extend His salvation to the whole world, not just the Jews in Israel. St. Paul says in the second reading: “...the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

The wise men likely heard of the wisdom found within the Jewish scriptures and sought out those scriptures in order to read and understand them. Perhaps early astronomers, the magi notice the appearance of a unique star that suggests to them the birth of a unique ruler, one that fits the prophecies they read about in the Jewish scriptures. The association of the star with the newborn child suggested that the child had cosmic and even divine significance, if even the heavens proclaim His presence in the world. Of course the magi were right, and the star led them to the Christ Child. We can only imagine their surprise at the circumstances in which they found the child – not in a royal palace, but in an ordinary house, being cared for by a seemingly ordinary couple. And yet, they understood, the child was more than ordinary. Are we able to see the presence of God, breaking through in seemingly ordinary circumstances? Can we look upon the newborn Jesus and see the eternal King? May God open our eyes, like He did for the magi, so that we, too, can see the face of God in the face of a child.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

Who has been a Bethlehem Star for you?

When it comes to faith, none of us can operate on our own. Sure, we can try, but if we try to live a life of faith on our own, disconnected from others in a believing community, it usually results in a lackluster faith. We need others – family, friends, fellow members of the Church, the family of God. The magi arrived in Bethlehem because of the guidance of a mysterious star that preceded them. Without the star, would they have known where they were going? Without the influence of even the evil-intentioned King Herod, would they have known where they were going? In the case of King Herod, sometimes God can make even a poor influence work for good. So, consider the people in your life who have been a “Bethlehem star” for you – people who strengthened your faith, people who helped you find your way along the pilgrimage of life, people who have made you a better person. These are the people we need to thank God for being a part of our lives. God sends others into our lives in order to make a positive impact. Personally, I owe my first debt of gratitude to my parents for baptizing me, for making sacrifices to provide me with a Catholic education, for raising me in a faith-filled home, and for being a positive influence all throughout my life. And from there, I have numerous friends who have strengthened my faith and helped me to discern God’s good will for my life. So, who are these people for you? For whom do you need to thank God? Who has been a light in the darkness for you? You would not be who you are today without those influences. And just as others have been a “Bethlehem star” for us, so we can become likewise for others. So, who around you is looking for your light, your faith, your hope to inspire them? Who among you needs you to help them be strong and faithful and to make the right decisions? May we all thank God for the people who have been a Bethlehem star for us, and may we also be a Bethlehem star for others.

Sunday December 26th, 2021 Feast of the Holy Family, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

Merry Christmas! Today’s Feast of the Holy Family gives us the only canonical episode of Jesus’ youth. He was 12 years old and chose to remain behind in Jerusalem after His family had been there for the feast of Passover. We may be tempted to think Jesus was a little like other pre-teens, starting to be a little disregarding of His parents. But the opposite is probably true: this is Jesus responding to the call to be near His Father, God, who dwelt in a special way in the Temple. The greatest compliment to the human family is the fact that the Son of God belonged to a human family. He grew up as the Son of Joseph and Mary. He belonged to a human family. He had chores to do around the house in Nazareth. He had a bedtime. He was educated in the Jewish scriptures. He went with His family to synagogue on Saturdays. He ate meals with Joseph and Mary. He learned His carpentry skills from Joseph.

In his book, *Mere Christianity*, apologist C. S. Lewis so eloquently states, “*The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.*” Here “men” is inclusive of all people.

Jesus takes on our humanity so that each and every human being can become a beloved child of God. And such is the truth revealed in our second reading: *“Beloved: see what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. And so we are.”* Jesus’ becoming a man elevates the dignity of every man and woman. Jesus becoming member of a human family elevates the dignity of all families. Jesus became a member of a human family so that we might all become members of the one family of God. This happens especially through baptism. We are members of the Church, the family of God. Parents have the special responsibility of raising God’s children. Through the prayers of the Holy Family – Jesus, Mary, and Joseph – may all families be a place where members know they’re loved by each other and by God our Father.

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

The Christian Family, the Domestic Church

When I first heard the Christian family referred to as the “domestic church,” I was struck by what that meant. Fundamentally, it means “the church at home,” but how so? It means that the Christian family is a family in which all of the members are baptized, and because of that, each family member is also a member of the family of God, the Church. The family is the place where children first learn to pray, to forgive, to share with others, to work together with others, and so many other things, all before they’re ever enrolled in a Catholic school or faith formation program. Parents are the first teachers of their children, before they ever receive instruction from a priest or a catechist. The great tragedy of our time is that parents sometimes abdicate their role as the first teachers of their children and hand that role over to a secular or Catholic school or faith formation program. The great responsibility of Christian parents is to faithfully raise the children whom God has entrusted to their care. After their death, Christian parents will have to answer before God for the job they did in raising their children in the faith. They’re not responsible for their children embracing the faith, but they are responsible for trying to help their children do so. Personally, I’m so very grateful for the sacrifices my parents made to give me a Catholic education, first at Resurrection for elementary and middle school, and then at Wahlert for high school. That education, and their own example of praying before meals and going to Mass together as a family, helped give me the “roots” to say yes to my vocation to be a priest. And on that note, every vocation is made possible in and through the family. It’s the vocation of parents to help children say yes to whatever vocation God calls them to embrace. Let’s pray for the families of our pastorate, especially young families, that they might have all they need to become a true “domestic church,” a place where our faith is known, loved, and celebrated. Holy Family – Jesus, Mary, and Joseph – pray for all of our families, that we might imitate you!

Sunday December 19th, 2021
4th Sunday of Advent, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

It's the 4th Sunday of Advent, and we'll celebrate Christmas at the end of the week. We'll celebrate Christmas Eve with Masses on Friday Dec. 24th at 4 p.m. in both Sherrill and Rickardsville and a 6 p.m. Mass in Holy Cross. For Christmas day, Saturday Dec. 25th, we'll celebrate Masses at 8 a.m. in Luxemburg and 10 a.m. in Balltown. There will be NO EVENING MASSES later that night. The very next day, Sunday Dec. 26th, we'll celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family with Masses at 8 a.m. in Luxemburg and 10 a.m. in Balltown. After you've attended Mass for Christmas, come back and attend Mass on Sunday. We'll still be celebrating Christmas! We'll celebrate the Christmas season until Sunday Jan. 9th with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. So keep the trees up and the music playing until then!

This weekend's Gospel gives us the "visitation" – Mary, newly pregnant with the Christ Child, traveled to visit her relative, Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. In the meeting of these two holy women, we have an invisible meeting between their children – the forerunner, John, in Elizabeth's womb, and Jesus, in Mary's womb. The first person to recognize the newly-conceived Jesus was the preborn John the Baptist. And it's from Elizabeth's words to Mary that we have a part of the part of the "Hail Mary" prayer – *"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."* Mary also gives us an excellent model of faith – *"Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."* Mary likewise helps us to grow in faith as we enter this final week before the celebration of Christmas. Through her prayers, may we, too, be blessed in our faith that God fulfilled His promise to humanity in sending us His only Son to be our Savior. Like her, may we welcome Jesus with open arms!

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

The prophecy about Bethlehem

The first reading this weekend from the prophet Micah gives us the prophecy about the birthplace of the Messiah – *"Thus says the Lord: You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to being among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; whose origin is from of old, from ancient times."* Historically, Bethlehem is the hometown of David, whom the prophet Samuel anointed to be King to succeed Saul in 1 Samuel chapter 16. The prophecy found in the Book of the prophet Micah was given by God to Micah many generations after David's death, but is most definitely intended to invoke the influence of David. Though deeply flawed in some significant ways, David was nonetheless a man after God's own heart. And the ruler that would ultimately take up the throne of David would be likewise. And Jesus, the Son of God, fits the bill as the one would inherit the throne because He existed well before David. Only the Son of God can claim origins *"from of old, from ancient times."* He existed with God from all eternity before choosing to become man and dwell among us at a certain point in time in the town of Bethlehem. The name, Bethlehem, is likewise significant as the birthplace of the Messiah – the name literally means "house of bread." And this makes sense if we understand that Jesus would eventually give Himself to His disciples under the appearance of bread and wine in the Eucharist. Jesus, born in the town of David, in fulfillment of prophecy,

is born in a place where cattle were feeding; and He came to feed us with Himself, to give us Himself to be our food and drink, to draw us into communion with Himself and save us through our sharing in His sacrificial gift. It's because of this prophecy (and the appearance of the star) that the wise men from the east knew to show up in Bethlehem with their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. We'll celebrate that event ("Epiphany") on Sunday Jan. 2nd. In the meantime, let's spiritually prepare our hearts to travel to Bethlehem to rejoice with Joseph and Mary at the birth of the Son of God.

Sunday December 12th, 2021

Second Sunday of Advent, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

This weekend we celebrate "Gaudete Sunday," the 3rd Sunday of Advent, a special Sunday in which we rejoice in the nearness of Christmas. The color for this Sunday is "rose" (not "pink") and although that won't be reflected in the vestment I wear at Mass (because we don't have "rose" vestments), it is reflected in the Advent wreath. St. Paul's words from the second reading are a good characterization of this weekend: *"Brothers and sisters: Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near."* As part of our joy at the nearness of Christmas, we'll celebrate a pastorate Christmas concert in Rickardsville on Sunday night at 6 p.m. I hope you're able to come and take in the stories and the sounds of the season!

This weekend we hear again from John the Baptist. When people ask him the question, "What should we do?" he responds with lots of very practical directives. If we take St. John the Baptist's responses and apply them to our lives, what sort of things would he tell us to do? He'd tell us to be mindful of the poor and the needy (cloaks and food). He'd tell us to avoid anything having to do with greed (collecting too much). He'd tell us to avoid injustice (extortion) and falsehood (false accusation) and to practice contentment with what we have (satisfaction with wages). St. John the Baptist invites the people to see the Messiah for who He is: *"He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."* Are we prepared to receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire that Jesus came to bring to the earth? Let's rejoice that He is near, and prepare our hearts for such a baptism!

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

St. Paul: "Have no anxiety at all...."

St. Paul can occasionally come across as not being really human at certain times. We hear his words and think (in our fallen, sinful nature), "That sounds impossible." Such might be our

thoughts as we consider his words in this weekend's second reading. He says, "*Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*" Really? Have no anxiety at all? Does St. Paul not know how many people these days are on anti-anxiety or antidepressant medication? Anxiety and depression are on the rise. So what is St. Paul saying? The key is what he says immediately afterward, "...*but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.*" What's the key to being without anxiety? Conversation with God. That's right, prayer. Now, I don't mean to say we just pray our way out of anxiety. But we can indeed pray our way into peace. Because that's what comes last, "*Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*" Peace is not the absence of war and conflict, but the presence of God. When we have God in our lives, we have peace. That doesn't mean we don't still experience anxiety, but that when we enter into conversation with God, "*by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,*" we come to know "*the peace of God that surpasses all understanding.*" And that peace that comes from God REPLACES the anxiety. Peace and anxiety can't coexist. Where there is anxiety, there is no peace. Where there is peace, there is no anxiety. And God wants us to have no anxiety at all, but to experience the supernatural peace that comes from being in communion with Him. THIS is the great tragedy of being "too busy to pray." Do we realize what we're missing?! We're missing the supernatural peace that prayer can bring into our lives! So, let's take St. Paul's words to heart. Let's regularly make time for prayer. Let's receive God's peace. And then we'll be free of anxiety as we return time and time again to communion with God.

Sunday December 5th, 2021

Second Sunday of Advent, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

Advent and Lent are times when we hear more about St. John the Baptist. He stands as a unique figure in the Gospels, simultaneously the last of Israel's great prophets the likes of which are found in the Old Testament (such as Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, etc.) and the forerunner of the Messiah whose story is told in the New Testament. He is a connector in that way between the old and the new testaments. His life in the desert became a beacon for people to become aware of the Messiah to come who was already in their midst. He is the fulfillment of a prophecy made by Isaiah, the voice crying out in the desert, "*Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.*" His message was one of repentance, calling the People of God to repent of their sins and turn back to God.

The message of St. John the Baptist is appropriate for Advent. How do we prepare the way of the Lord and make straight his paths? What are the obstacles that stand in our way of welcoming the Messiah with open arms? Are we too attached to status or reputation? Do we think too

much about the opinions of others? Are we too busy to pray? Are we as generous with God and others as we can be? Do we give of our time and energy to help those in need and those who are less fortunate? Friends, we, too, need repentance, just as the people of the Baptist's time needed repentance. The penitential purple color which characterizes this season invites us to examine our hearts and minds before God. Are we living lives pleasing to Him? Are our hearts open to the coming of His Son? Do we find ourselves going through the motions? Now's the season to change our lives in order to welcome God's Messiah!

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

The Prayer of St. Paul in the Second Reading

St. Paul says, *"And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God."* Because it is also the inspired word of God, this prayer represents God's good will for us. God wants our love to increase, for Him and for others. He does not wish for animosity or a spirit of enmity to exist among his people. I am most saddened when I see Catholics treat their fellow Catholics like enemies. That is a situation that should not exist among the people of God. We must always be ready and willing to forgive offenses committed against us. We must always be ready and willing to ask for forgiveness when it happens that we have wronged others. We pray the Our Father, but do we mean what we pray? If we did, a spirit of enmity would be nonexistent among members of the People of God. If we meant what we pray, we would acknowledge God as our Father and ourselves as His children. We would keep His name holy and never take it in vain. We would desire His kingdom to come and His will to be done, on earth just as it is in heaven. We would trust Him to provide for our needs rather than worry. We would ask forgiveness for our sins and be ready to forgive those who sin against us. We would not allow ourselves to be led into temptation, nor would we lead others into temptation. We would experience God's power to deliver us from evil, and we would help others be delivered as well. In short, if we lived as we believed, we would be blessed by God and we would become a blessing as well. That is God's good will for our lives. *"I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus."* May God fulfill the good work He has begun in us!

Sunday November 28th, 2021
First Sunday of Advent, Year C

Dear Pastorate Family,

We've now entered a new liturgical year and new liturgical season! Welcome to Advent. During this holy season, we prepare ourselves to celebrate the first coming of Jesus to humanity as a little baby lying in a manger. But we're also looking forward to that day when the Lord will

come again to establish a new kingdom of God in heaven and on earth. We look forward with hope to that unknown day when heaven and earth will be remade, a new creation, the old order having passed away. The beginning of Advent connects with the end of Ordinary Time around the theme of the Lord's second coming. The second coming of Jesus has been longed for and anticipated by generations, now for even longer than His first coming was longed for and anticipated by the Jewish people. It's been more than 2,000 years since His birth, and it will soon be 2,000 years since His death and resurrection (approximately 2033).

As people of faith, we can look forward to Jesus' second coming with hope. But the last words of the Gospel are probably meant for us who believe in His second coming: *"Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man."* There will be people on earth when Jesus comes again. Who will those people be? Those people could be us – we don't know. But Jesus' exhortation is to remain vigilant and pray. That's the "agenda" of Advent: be vigilant and pray. What do you want your life to look like if Jesus comes back again in our lifetime? May God find us living faithfully when He comes again!

God bless,
Fr. Diehm

The Hope of Jesus' Second Coming

The blessing of the Advent wreath says: *"Lord our God, we praise you for your Son, Jesus Christ: he is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples, he is the wisdom that teaches and guides us, he is the Savior of every nation. Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we light the candles of this wreath. May the wreath and its light be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation. May he come quickly and not delay. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen."* Jesus is all of the things mentioned in this prayer: He is Emmanuel ("God is with us"), the hope of the peoples, the wisdom that teaches and guides us, and the Savior of every nation. The final petition of this prayer is another good theme for Advent: *"May He come quickly and not delay."* We long for the day when Jesus will come again. We long to see mercy triumphant and justice fulfilled; we long to see wrongs made right, the righteous rewarded, and the wicked punished; we long to see a world made strange by sin made right by God's redeeming grace; we long to see the corrupt kingdom of man overthrown and the perfect Kingdom of God firmly established. This whole life is "Advent" – it's an expectant longing for the time when the Lord's promises will be fulfilled in the second coming of Jesus. Will there be distress and fright before His coming? Yes, undoubtedly, and those without faith will be thrown into confusion. *"But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand."* The response of Christians to the second coming of Jesus is one of anticipation because then, finally, the world will be made new, and a new creation will be established and the old order destroyed. The beginning of this holy season invites us to long for Jesus' second coming in power and glory while we prepare to celebrate His first coming in humility and meekness. The full story is not

yet complete. The second coming of Jesus will be the final chapter. And during this Advent season, let's pray: "*May He come quickly and not delay.*"