

## The Easter Pastoral Letter - 2009

*At a recent vestry meeting we agreed to stop all mass mailings from the parish office. With the exception of a few dear friends who live in other states -we decided to save money by letting mailings be collected from the back of church and also by publishing Pastoral Letters in the Cobblestone. This is the first.*

This letter will then be available on the first day of April, or maybe you will pick it up on Palm Sunday. Either way, you will read it before Easter. I constantly remind myself that I am the Pastor of everyone in the parish irrespective of how often they come, rich or poor, Republican or Democrat, old or young, whether they are deeply involved or not, and whether they like me or can't abide me. There is a sense that, when I am the Pastor and the Priest, I belong to everyone and my duties and obligations are to the service of each individual with impartiality. The reasons for this are easy and obvious. I may well have to be at everyone's bedside as they pass from this life. I will give them all the holy rites of the church, including Christ's forgiveness for their sins and I will unite them in prayer with their fellow parishioners as the Body of Christ. Administering the Sacraments, home and hospital visits fall into that category. Whether you are renewing your wedding vows or having your baby baptized, you can ask your priest to do it with the certain knowledge that he is never going to refuse. He is in a sense merely the means by which Christ's grace flows into your life at certain times. That is why in many parts of the Anglican Communion, he is referred to as 'Vicar', meaning: "one who takes the place of Christ."

We think a lot about the person of Jesus Christ in this season of Lent, and particularly as we approach Holy Week. Christ is the center of our church life, to him we owe our allegiance and worship and our best effort. The role of pastor is a role of service for no other reason than that this was the model that Christ left us. In the readings of Holy Week we see that Christ gave everything for those that he loved, his disciples, his followers and God's Chosen people, the Jews. In suffering and dying, as he did on Good Friday, he suffered and died for all, good as well as bad, Pharisee as well as Apostle, Roman as well as Israelite. In our call as Christians, we cannot do less. We too are called to be Christians for all, irrespective of whether they are friend or stranger. The cross becomes our symbol, because it reminds us that in dying such a cruel death God choose to accept us all as his children and heirs to the kingdom that Jesus taught us about. If we are God's children, then Paul reminds us that we are brother and sister.

I think that we should be enormously proud that we live, worship and pray on a weekly basis with people who personify the suffering of Jesus and his service to others. No one wants to be sick or ill. Yet, we have all been made aware of the courage, fortitude and strength of our brothers and sisters who have battled against adversity in the last year. Their names appear like an honor role in the bulletin week after week. They are our true

‘vicars’ who wear the face of Christ for all of us, not just in Lent, but throughout the year. In doing so they unite themselves with the Paschal Mystery of Easter. That is a very old theological concept that says: “when Christians unite their suffering and pain with that of Christ on the Cross, they in a very real spiritual way share in his death and resurrection.” The grace that flows from that union is both powerful and Spirit filled. It is a grace that many do not just accept for themselves, but share it with their family, friends and church. I believe that the blessings we as a church have experienced and will experience flows from that sort of selfless-love.

And love is really what it is all about, isn’t it? Jesus’ death on the cross is theologically an act of love. “Greater love than this has no man than he lays down his life for a friend.” Our Paschal Mystery suffers perform that same act of love for us. They unite us to the suffering and salvation of Christ. More, they unite us with his resurrection. In so doing the Holy Spirit comes upon us as recipients of Christ’s salvific grace, that is, the grace he won for us on the cross. What does that mean? It means that the future good that we do, the ministries we undertake, the salvation we bring to others, is blessed and graced by the link that they have made which is unbreakable. Out of suffering pours forth God’s love, thus it has always been since the days of those first Christian Martyrs. So it is again in our day.

Love is an immoveable force. It is a powerful persuader. Indefatigable and resolute it will squeeze between apathy and weakness, hate and indifference. Love will conquer where all else fails. Building and growing the church and parish on love is the message of this Easter season. I am not suggesting that it could happen, or may happen I am informing you that it is happening. “What is coming out of all this suffering? –Love! What is the force driving the recovery of this church and parish? –love!

When in the weeks after the death and resurrection of Jesus the Jewish Sanhedrin meet to discuss what to do about his followers and their teaching they were in a quandary as to what to do. Some wanted to imprison the Apostles or even execute them. The oldest and wisest of the Jewish teachers stood up to speak, his name was Gamerial.

“Brothesr,” he said. “We need do nothing. For if what they teach is not from God, it will surely die and blow away like a desert wind. But, if it is from God, if it has the power of God’s Spirit, then no force on earth will stop it.”

The agenda has been set. It is Christ’s agenda and his salvation. Positive and sure of the outcome we as a church and parish stride on into a future that is bright with optimism that the Holy Spirit is already, day by day growing the Gospel, and the Kingdom in our midst. Already the seeds have been sown. Evangelism is taking root, ministries formerly sagging are being revitalized, worship and liturgy are blossoming and love, real love is being demonstrated among you in homes, and projects, rehearsals and practice.

“Show us a sign!” the Jews demand in John chapter two. We too would look for a sign that we are indeed on the right path and walking in the way of the Lord. That sign is all too clear in the sign of the cross that so many have embraced with their own suffering.

But, if that was not enough, we have also been gifted with the traditional sign that the Spirit is at work – calls to ministry. As we stand witness to Michelle and Fran moving forward on the process to ministry, let us continue to pray for them. at the same time, let us allow ourselves to be filled with joy, gratitude and enthusiasm for the mission ahead that God has called us to. This is a great time to belong to the church of the Good Shepherd and St John the Evangelist. This is a great time to be a Christian. This is a time when the deep love you have for your church is touching many hearts. A holy and blessed Easter to you all.

With every blessing, Fr. Bill McGinty.