

Dear friends,

As we reach the mid-point of Advent, let us ask ourselves: “What have the Sunday readings told us so far?” Be vigilant: to be waiting and watching for the Lord’s coming. Repent: Wounds and pains will make it difficult to receive Him – and others – with authentic joy that accompanies true faith. Last week, John the Baptist told us that now is the time to repent from sin for the Kingdom of God is at hand. This week, Jesus tells John through messengers that salvation is offered to the poor and afflicted. After ages of waiting, there is finally relief in sight for those who suffer.

As we proceed through this season of healing and grace, it should become apparent of God’s love for us in the birth of His son and in the sacrifice of the cross. Who or what else can forgive and love us unconditionally? No one...What other place can we receive grace and nourishment than the Mass and sacraments? Nowhere...That’s more reason for us to become more acquainted with what is happening at Mass with the senses and abilities that God Himself gave us.

If you missed it, I encourage you to read the first Sunday of Advent bulletin article. This covered the ritual preparation of the altar, describing in detail the significance of the cloths, their placement, the symbolism and purpose. This week, we toured through what happens during the preparation of the altar, which is the preparation and presentation of the gifts. As the altar is being prepared, three things are being taken up or collected from the congregation for presentation: money, bread and wine, and the offering of one’s self. Mention of the word collection and the first thought is about money. With money comes the desire to acquire and a hesitation to part with it. But we are not to operate as a bank or an investment group nor should we seek a stockpile of money just for the sake of keeping it. It’s about being taking care of the needs of our parish and the greater community, whether in the surrounding area or other parts of the diocese, country or world. In that sense, all of us do our part to fund the mission that lies before us. I often wonder what will happen in ten, maybe twenty years down the road when no one carries any money with them, and everything is electronic. If this becomes the norm, does that mean the collection will cease? No, because again, collecting money isn’t the sole purpose of what is happening here. We can give all the money we want and hope that by giving a particular problem or issue will go away. However, we cannot buy our way into heaven nor purchase favor with God or others. On the other hand, there is serious need of examination if one takes the approach that someone else will take care of the needs or we feel that we already give enough. This is precisely the reason the collection begins at the front of the pews and works its way to the back: it is the role of every parishioner (individual or family) to participate in offering a sacrifice to the Lord. No one group can be singled out for this: it is not solely the responsibility of more established (some would say older) parishioners to keep things moving. Nor is it a mere exercise for young people to engage in as if it were a lesson about giving money. In offering our sins, pains and sufferings, we are willing to present them to the Lord and be brought forward to the altar.

Some parishioners will remember a time when collections were taken up on a plate that was passed between the pews, handed from one parishioner to another. This ensures that every person made contact with the plate, symbolizing the expectation that everyone assembled participates together. The plate symbolizes the paten that the priest raises to God from the altar. A basket that is weaved in an out of the pews simply doesn’t do justice to the purpose, does it? One of the resources I consulted suggested a prayer that could be recited in preparation for the

offertory: “Lord, how can I fit my entire self onto the paten that will be placed upon the altar and raised to You?” This is the moment that we pass on to the Lord our willingness to make sacrifice to Him. But the Lord wants something more than sacrifice: a contrite heart. If charity and generosity are not rooted in sacrifice and enveloped by prayer and contrite heart, something is not right. I don’t see how we will be fully prepared to welcome the Lord on the day of His arrival in birth and judgement if these parts are not working in tandem.

This week, there are two opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. On Wednesday, December 18, confessions will be heard from 6:00-8:00pm. On Saturday, December 21, confessions will be heard from 11:30am-4:30pm. Fr. Don Curtiss will be available from 1:30-3:00pm in the Brennan Chapel should you desire to receive the sacrament from an outside confessor (i.e. someone other than myself or Fr. Brown). Some find it easier to go to a priest they do not know, some prefer to go to a priest they are familiar with. Fr. Brown, Fr. Curtiss and I will be available at various points of that day. With these options and time frame, I encourage you to make time in your schedule for either of these opportunities for forgiveness.

Lastly, a note about the Christmas Mass schedule. Last year, over 850 people filled the church and ASA gymnasium for the 4:00pm Christmas Eve Vigil, accounting for roughly half of the total attendance of all four Masses. This year, we are preparing to welcome at least the same amount of people as we did last year. With that, I invite you to consider attending one of the later Masses that is offered, whether it be the 6:30, midnight or 10:00am. The experience will be an easier one, where access to parking and seating and will remove the stress and burden that accompanies large events like these. A few parishioners attempted to attend last year’s 4:00pm Mass, but after circling the campus they realized a later Mass would be easier to manage. I offer this suggestion in hopes that we can alleviate concerns of large crowds. Above all, when deciding which Mass to attend, make it a priority among the activities of the day.

In Christ,

Fr. Jones