

Dear Friends of St. Anthony,

Several months have passed since my last letter to you. I purposely held off writing because I wasn't sure if we had a future! Only recently have we been assured that the Franciscan Friars of Holy Name Province will indeed remain at St. Bonaventure Church, Paterson, where we settled soon after our arrival from Germany in 1876. For one hundred forty-two years, the friars have lived in fraternity and worked in ministry at this beautiful site. We look forward to remaining here for at least

NEWSLETTER

Saint Anthony Shrine of the Sick & Poor
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another hundred forty-two years!

This decision to remain was made after a two-year process that engaged the participation of all the friars as well as our local diocese and lay partners, in evaluating the future sustainability of the Province's 30 Fraternities-in-Mission, among them parishes, elementary schools, colleges, urban ministry centers, soup kitchens, and other pastoral and social justice ministries.

What motivated this evaluation? The main reason is the decline in the number of friars. Not enough young ones are coming in to replace the older ones! This makes it impossible to maintain the core component of our lives together as Franciscans, and that is living in fraternity as we minister to local communities of faith.

In 1985, just 35 years ago, Holy Name Province had 708 friars. That number dropped to 443 in 2001. At present there are a little less than 300. A number of men

are in the initial formation process, but only three friars have professed their solemn vows since August 2018.

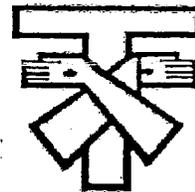
Our Provincial Minister, Fr. Kevin Mullen, O.F.M., a son of St. Bon's Parish, explained that the friars have been spread too thin for quite some time. The evaluation process of the last two years has allowed us to reset and right-size our ministerial commitments. Since our fraternal life is central to our vocation – living in community and serving together as brothers – this realignment will help our friars more effectively serve the people in our ministries.

On Saturday evening, February 16, 2020, the faith community of St. Bonaventure Church celebrated a Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving for our many answered prayers of the last two years! There I spoke about the strategic planning we must now begin in order to be prepared for the *next* evaluation that will no doubt confront us again in three years. Following the Mass of Thanksgiving, more than two-hundred parishioners and friends crossed Ramsey Street to Bishop Manning Hall where we feasted on a delicious Italian

Dinner prepared by our Knights of Columbus.

In the midst of these growing pains and renewed hopes, *St. Anthony Shrine for the Sick and Poor* continues as an oasis of quiet and peace in the midst of Route 80's steady roar of traffic. With your help and prayers, the Shrine will continue in its mission, to be a place of prayer for so many who visit the Shrine to place their needs in the care of the Miracle Worker of Padua, St. Anthony. May he continue to intercede for us before God through the Christ Child and in the power of the Holy Spirit! Peace and good to you and your families!

Sincerely in Christ and St. Anthony,
Fr. Daniel Grigassy, O.F.M.
 Pastor and Guardian
 St. Bonaventure Church & Friary



ASH WEDNESDAY & LENT APPROACH

Almost a hundred years ago, the famous British poet, T. S. Eliot, wrote six loosely connected poems that he grouped under the

title, "Ash Wednesday." If there's a central theme that threads itself through the text, it is that of the ongoing struggle that the Christian must engage in during the second half of life. After initial conversion, there arises in all of us the necessity of facing up to the challenge of a new state in life. In lines that are often quoted, Eliot prays that God will "teach us to care and not to care," that God will "teach us to sit still."

The poet's hope is that he will leave behind all that is relatively insignificant so he might be free to attend to what really matters. As he says, "I pray that I may forget / These matters that with myself I too much discuss / Too much explain...." All of us tend to get caught up in trivia, in pettiness, and in niggling power plays. They are commonplace in every human life. And so, we *all* need both to forget and to remember.

The ritual and readings of our Ash Wednesday liturgy launch us on our Lenten journey to Easter. They have an important significance: they call us to leave behind the

trifles that clutter our lives and attend to what ultimately matters. This does not mean that we are called to run away from the humdrum business of daily life; it does mean that we are called to find extraordinary power and meaning in what we casually dismiss as ordinary. In a sense, putting ashes on our heads is a rather insignificant action, but in a culture where we hardly take a breath to reflect deeply on anything at all, what we do on Ash Wednesday is not only significant; it is healthy.

We remind ourselves that we are all in the process of dying.

"Remember, you are dust and to dust you shall return." In a world where people spend lots of time and energy denying death and in flight of death, our ritual is not only counter-cultural; it is honest and frank.

Fasting, too! We fast *not* to assert that we are spirits-in-need-of no food and drink. We fast to acknowledge that we are bodies who *do*, in fact, have needs, experienced as we feel the longing

for food and drink and fullness of life in the pit of our stomachs. In our fasting we become a prayer – as we affirm that God is our life, that God is the one for whom we hunger.

And yet our hungers find themselves fed in other places. We are consumers! In a sense, a consumerist culture is usually organized *against* history. It focuses me so much into the present and the immediate fulfillment of my present needs that I forget my past – and so trivialize it. A consumerist culture tends to depreciate memory and disregard hope – other than hope for material comforts.

A community that is committed to energizing memories and spurred on by radical hope transcending materialism is not only a contemporary curiosity; it can even be a threat in such a culture. It is our task to be a witness to the memory of Christ and the hope for the fulfillment of his promise of new and risen life.

Throughout these forty days of Lent, our most pressing concern is to refresh and enliven Christian memories and hopes. We remember where we come from; we remember where we are going. It is in the memory of the death of the Lord that we find meaning; it is in the wood of the Cross that we find our unalterable hope. “O God, teach us to care and not to care. Teach us to sit still.”

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From the words of St. Anthony

Alas, how many disturbing thoughts go through our hearts! As a result, we lack the leisure to enjoy the bread of heaven and to taste the joys of interior contemplation. For that reason, the Good Master invites us: ‘Come apart from the restless throng into a desert place, into solitude of mind and body. When we withdraw from the turbulence of the world and rest in quiet and solitude, then does the Lord make himself known to us.

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Thank you for your continuing support of *St. Anthony Shrine for the Sick and Poor*. This Newsletter will be published four times a year beginning with this, the first issue, February 2020.

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