

**July 25, 2021**  
**17<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time**

Have you ever felt fragmented? Sometimes it can be over the simplest of things. Like trying to get out the door in the morning, feeling slightly rushed, there seems to never be enough time to do everything that needs to be done. Then it happens. Your keys are not where you always put them. That simple thing can be enough to throw off a whole day. Fragmented, loss of clear concentration, needing to put time and energy into something that you did not plan on.

What if magnify that experience to families, communities, a nation or our world. Sometimes it feels that we have lost our focus, that we are running in so many directions, that we have little time for each other. It seems that people have lost the ability to truly listen to each other, to just be with each other. It can be easy to fall into looking at a screen more than talking with a person. Healthy debates whether in the news or among politicians or even among friends, seems to be a lost art. Division, fragmentation, seems to be more and more a reality in every part of our society, even in the Church.

Fragmentation among people might be more intense today because of mass communication and social media mixed in with false news. The bigger the audience, the more difficult it can be to communicate. Clear messages people. The human mind has become lazy, distracted, even fragmented. I have noticed that it is more difficult to keep my attention focused while reading a book since I have been on social media.

People in Biblical times were also fragmented. Their fragmentation came from the experiences of sin, suffering and death which left them feeling isolated and without hope. We share those experiences as well.

The word of God came to them with the message of hope and healing through people like Elisha, in the Second Book of Kings and most especially through God's only Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ come to us to gather up everything that is fragmented, he takes everything that seeks to destroy us to himself and then feed us with the word of hope and the Bread of Life.

I personally, as your pastor need to hear and experience the message hope of that we hear today in the readings. The hope that the Lord can gather together the broken fragments from what I thought would not be enough into baskets of abundance. I feel like I am trying to lead this parish that became fragmented during the pandemic, into a new and different experience of being the one Body of Christ. I am encouraged by your prayers, by your support and that slowly people are coming back. I am remain concerned about our future. I wonder, will everyone who used to come to Mass before the pandemic come back?

Everything that I read indicates that probably not. There are times that I feel fragmented and afraid. I feel concern and even fear when I notice the diminishment in our community. Just this month, we lost some of our long-time parishioners who helped to build this parish in its early years. I don't see many young people stepping up to replace them. Then on the other hand, we also suffered the loss of a 17-year-old, shot to death in the Factoria Mall parking lot. The second such death in our parish this year. The experience of being a teenager can be even more fragmented than in the past. One of our parishioners was the school nurse for both of these boys, wrote to me with a broken heart and asked, what can we do to prevent these senseless acts? People in our parish experience deep fragmentation.

What else can we do but to turn to Jesus who constantly asks us to trust in him and to believe that there will more than enough when we give our lives to him. On the human level, as I look at our parish and its future, especially the financial needs that we experience with operating

expenses that are beyond our control that keep going up, and number of people who make a commitment to give going down each year, the former school building that is failing and needs to be torn down and replaced with a building that meets our parish needs today, we are talking about millions of dollars that we don't have and I wonder if we can raise. Our parish has not been able to afford to our staff a decent raise in the seven years I have been your pastor. That is not just. We used to receive a rebate every year from the Annual Catholic Appeal. The smooth asphalt that we now walk on to the main entrance of the Church was covered by ACA rebate some five years ago. In more recent years we barely made our goal, so we had little or no rebate in return. In fact, last year, we did not make our goal. That meant we had to make up the difference of nearly \$15,000 dollars from our ordinary income. All of that makes me fear for our long- term future and to feel fragmented. That is why I believed that the responsible thing to do was to make serious reductions in our parish staff.

As most of you know, last month at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, I took a step-in faith and let go of fear. I clearly heard that message from Jesus in my prayer and so did not make the level of reduction in our staff that I had originally planned and many of you have thanked me for it. The real thanks goes to the Lord, which is what we do in every Eucharist. Now I need you now to take a similar step of faith together with me. If we can listen to the message of what Jesus is saying, that if we follow his command and gather the fragments together, there will be more than enough. This is our time. This is time that the Lord has given us to put our faith into action.