CONTEMPLATE THE POSSIBILITY

How often have you had a hard time sleeping because you’ve had so much on your mind that you can’t quiet the noise in your head? That’s been my experience lately. When you look at the construction site next to the church you’ll understand why. Benedictine author and spiritual guide, Sr. Joan Chittester wrote: *There is a part of the soul that stirs at night, in the dark and soundless times of day, when our defenses are down and our daylight distractions no longer serve to protect us from ourselves. What we suppress in the light emerges in the dusk. It’s then -- in the still of life, when we least expect it -- that questions emerge from the damp murkiness of our inner underworld. Questions with ringtones that call the soul to be alert, but do not come with ready resolutions. Questions about life, not dailiness. . . These questions do not call for the discovery of data; they call for the contemplation of possibility.*

In these past nearly forty years of ordained ministry I’ve served in five different parishes from Buffalo, NY to Aurora, CO and now the Oakland Diocese. Over half those years have been spent happily here at St. Perpetua. I came to a realization this week, after challenging meetings with the construction team for our new Community Center and meetings with our parish staff and Capital Campaign consultant, that this phrase – the contemplation of possibility – is also a perfect description of what it means for me to be a priest serving God’s people. First, I have to accept who we are -- each person as he or she is -- with all their goodness and strengths, in all their struggles and weaknesses – and accept the entire bread, a sip of wine and, on our lips and in our hearts, we taste Paradise itself. For those who see with the eyes of faith, nothing is ordinary anymore. All becomes sacrament -- a finger pointing to something greater than itself. This world -- your life and mine -- is the canvas on which God paints so that we can perceive with our hearts the divine beauty that we cannot see with our eyes. In the Eucharist we contemplate the possibility of the Kingdom of God in our midst. We are nourished in order to bring to our world the presence of Christ whose life we share in this sacred meal. St. Augustine said: *You receive the body of Christ; now become the body of Christ.* That’s a tall order for us, but that’s what Eucharist is all about.

*Feast of the Body & Blood of Christ*

*Cycle B, 6.3.18
Exodus 24:3-8/Hebrews 9:11-15/
Mark 14:12-16, 22-26*

Today on this feast of Corpus Christi, the Body and Blood of Christ, I find that Sr. Joan’s phrase provides me with an insight into the mystery of the Eucharist: the contemplation of possibility. A morsel of *“Become what you receive”*  

*St. Augustine*
community in the same way. And not only to accept, but to love. Then, with the grace of God and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, I have to “contemplate the possibility” of who we can become.

Accepting who we are is easy – dedicated parishioners, a vibrant school community, several hundred families engaged in faith formation and sacramental programs, outreach ministry that supports many programs for the poor and needy, an experience of prayer and worship each week that is meaningful, well-planned and well-celebrated, a parish team of outstanding co-ministers who are a joy to work with, a setting in the Lafayette hills that’s incredibly beautiful. I’m lucky to be here and so proud of you as “the Body of Christ.” I feel that pride each time a visitor leaves the church after a Sunday Mass and tells me that they wished they lived in the area so they could be a part of our parish.

More challenging is that second part – “contemplating the possibility” of who we can become. And that charge can only be done by all of us together – because it’s your life, your community, your faith and your stewardship that will make the “possibility” a “reality.” In 2002 we embarked on an exciting initiative to reinvigorate our faith community, while renewing and expanding our parish facilities. That effort led to a major addition and complete remodel of our parish school spearheaded by dedicated school families.

In 2013 we renewed our worship space with a new altar platform, music ministry area and interior painting. In 2014 we took the plunge and embarked on the most expansive and expensive endeavor yet – the dream of a new Community Center: a place where we will connect with one another, engage more fully in ministry and service, provide greater learning opportunities for our children and youth, invite others to share our faith, and celebrate all the events and gatherings that make us who we are – the Body of Christ – now and for generations to come.

This multi-generational project is well underway. Much of the expense of our project goes into features that we’ll never see – building permits, city and county fees, soils stabilization, retaining walls, underground pipes for water, sewage, electrical and gas lines – even grease receptors. Our Capital Campaign includes the expense of installing a sprinkler system in the church as mandated by the county. We began building this project in 2017 knowing we would have to do another fundraising campaign after we started construction. We just didn’t know how much we would need until we opened the can of worms and invested in detailed construction drawings. Taking into account a major 1953 landslide behind the church, extensive geotechnical engineering requirements, unknown and significant contingencies stemming from a 65 year old site, failing service road and parking lot, rampant construction inflation – as much as 15-20%/year, and labor shortages, those of us who have been involved in this project on a daily basis understand why we are where we are today.

After 7 months of construction, we now know that we need to raise another $2 million in pledges to complete the project
as envisioned. Most of the unknowns are now behind us. We have raised an amazing $8 million to date as we watch the building slowly rise above us. The parish has never had a facility like this in its 65 years of existence. So this will be the start of bringing a whole new dimension to our faith-filled community utilizing a state of the art facility to better serve our parish and school mission statements...Imagine the possibilities! If we don't raise the $2 million in pledges, we will have to stop construction at some point this coming fall, since the Diocese will not front the funding shortfall without knowing we have those pledges. The project will have to be shut down before our January 2019 target completion date, only eight months away!

Today, we are officially kicking off the final fundraising phase of our project..."

Continuing our Growth... Building our Future – Our Vision Realized. We have retained CMG (Charitable Management Group), a professional fundraising company, to manage the campaign and to help lead us to success. Our time is now to band together as a community to "bring this project home" and to realize our dream. In my seminary days we weren’t offered courses on construction financing, yet in every parish I’ve served, renovation, construction and raising money have been significant preoccupations. I regret the time these efforts take away from more significant pastoral responsibilities and I’m asking your help to be able to raise the necessary funds and make this project a success we can all take pride in and enjoy. I’m grateful to the group of parish and school parents who prodded me and began this effort three years ago, especially Tom Banis and Kevin Fisher. The members of the original Campaign committee who solicited parishioners for their financial support have my gratitude as well. The current construction and architectural team have been working diligently on our behalf. I rely on all these folks for their insight, professionalism and competence.

I’m confident that parishioners and friends of St. Perpetua Community will show the same generosity you demonstrated in our campaign three years ago. For those families who already completed your pledge, we’ll invite you to consider making a new commitment. For those families with a remaining pledge balance, we’ll invite you to consider extending your pledge. For those who have not yet supported the campaign or who were never asked previously, we invite you to pledge your support. In the coming months we’ll be reaching out to all our parish family. I believe that this undertaking will produce an amazing facility that we will be proud of and that will serve you and your families and families for many generations.
I ask you to consider three things: to invest your time and talent to serve as a member of our Campaign team; to search your own heart and make a financial commitment; and most importantly, to pray for the success of our project and all it represents for the future of St. Perpetua Community. Psalm 127 begins with these words: *Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain.* Pray that our labors will not be in vain, but entrusting this project to God’s design, may our efforts be blessed by the Lord who inspires and guides us.

*Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain.*

Psalm 127:1a

*John Kasper, OSFS*