November 3, 2019: Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Over the last few weeks I have read and listened to many parishioners’ insights and concerns about the proposed changes to the Mass schedule. In any Church community this is a difficult moment, as it brings about disruption in a place where people want stability. It is clear to me that people have created real connections in the community where they have attended Mass over many years. Hence, change can bring to the fore many different feelings, all of which are reasonable.

It is understandable that people want things to remain the same, or at least remain the same for them. It is also understandable that people can get a little parochial, that is, a little narrow in their perceptions of what is needed. The reality is that we must be proactive in our planning. It is getting increasingly difficult to get help in covering our current Mass schedule, and as time goes on, it will only get more difficult. The number of priests who can help is diminishing as they are being pulled in many different directions by the number of parishes needing help. We must look to create a schedule, sooner rather than later, that can work for two priests, but also one that, on any given weekend, a single priest can handle on his own. It would be irresponsible of me, as your pastor, not to prepare our community for this real need. And this need is not something that is coming sometime in the future; it is a real issue that we are facing here and now.

It is also necessary in any evaluation to recognize that the disruptions are not simply issues of convenience. The reality is that the concerns people have are many times rooted in very understandable difficulties that any change can bring about. But it is also a reality that people tend to focus on, and give top priority to, what the disruptions will mean to them or the people they care about. Might we try asking ourselves… “Will I make it all about me and my perceived needs, or will I look to the greater good?” And in our particular situation: “Will I look only to what is good for my community, or will I recognize that I am part of the Church and am called to look to the needs of both communities?”

We are in a time of transition in our Church, and what that will ultimately entail I do not know. What I do know is that what we are now facing as a Church is nothing new in the life of the Church: She has always encountered and weathered storms throughout the centuries. To me, there is little doubt that the same will be true during our time of tribulation. What is clear is the reason the Church has always made it past her difficulties: the faith and determination of the people of God and the enduring power of the Holy Spirit.

As I have read all the comments and listened directly to concerns, what I find to be truly heartening is the level of understanding most of you have. A very few have commented in ways that were, quite frankly, harsh and somewhat lacking in Christian sensibility, but most of those struggling with the change are doing so with a real sense of Christian love and concern. Yes, some may decide to walk away. It is easy to do when things get difficult—when they do not go our way. The real test of faith is not found in acting as Christ when it is easy. Rather, the real test is when we are called to act against our own perceived needs and desires, in order to act for the good of others. It is clear to me what the depth of commitment is of the people of our two communities for their parish families and our collaborative. Working together, we will weather this storm. We will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to be his instrument of love and support in this time of tribulation. We have something very special in how these two communities are working together, and there should be little doubt that we have created, and will continue to create, a place where Christ is found. Our ultimate purpose is to be that instrument of Christ in the lives of others. We must be willing to do so no matter what the situation or circumstance is. We must do so no matter if it is convenient or inconvenient. The ultimate reality is not about when or where we go to Mass, but that we go to Mass. It is about the reality that we are truly blessed by how available Mass is to us, which is not true for much of the world, and even in many parts of our country. It is about recognizing the ultimate purpose of the Mass, which is for the building up of a community of faith that seeks to follow Christ and to be Christ for others.

Whatever may be determined over the next few months, I have one simple request: first and foremost, please seek to be Christ for others.
If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

Fr. Brian