

Dear Parishioners of St. Pius X,

July 19, 2020

Well, it's the middle of July, which means that the good and holy Fr. Milton has now made his way down to Chillicothe, and is getting himself settled and focused, to begin ministry at his new assignment. Like you, I will certainly miss him, and am so grateful to God for having sent Fr. Milton to be with us, here at St. Pius X. Please continue to keep him in your prayers, as he adapts to serving at three different parishes, spread across two different counties!

Now, speaking of adaptation: Whether we like it or not, we've all become awfully familiar, lately, with the notions of flexibility and change, on account of this maddening pandemic. For that reason, I had originally planned to wait (at least until the new year) to introduce any further changes around the parish. That was *my* plan, anyway. But the good Lord had something else in mind, and He was pretty insistent when I'd brought these things to prayer. So, given that we're in this current state of flux together, I want to share with you some changes that will be happening here at St. Pius X, in the coming weeks.

First, the most obvious change is the one I've already mentioned: Fr. Milton has now departed St. Pius X, to serve a whole new set of faces and families, down in Chillicothe and Waverly. His (unanticipated) reassignment was really the final nudge from the Holy Spirit that prompted me to get moving on these other changes.

Now, this next change was posted in the bulletin last weekend (July 11/12), but with everything else going on, I don't expect many folks noticed it: As with nearly every other parish in the Diocese of Columbus, our Weekend Mass schedule here at St. Pius X is changing, and downsizing a bit. Beginning on the weekend of August 1st and 2nd, this will be our new Weekend Mass schedule:

**Saturdays: 3:00pm - Confessions
4:30pm - Vigil Mass**

**Sundays: 8:00am - Mass
10:00am - Mass**

Why the change? Well, over the past year, Bishop Brennan has been asking the pastors of each deanery to take a proactive look at our parishes. Given our current Mass times, the attendance numbers at each of those Masses (over the past five years), and our church pew seating capacity, the question was posed: Could we be using our precious resources in a more prudent way, especially with the diminishing number of priests in mind? In response, neighboring pastors within each deanery worked hard to develop a local Mass schedule that offered the greatest range of Mass times for the faithful of our regions. We did our best to structure these new Mass schedules in a way that provided you, our people, with the most accessible, most expansive opportunities to attend Mass, every weekend. By balancing the declining number of priests with a staggered set of locally coordinated Mass times, and (reluctantly) eliminating our Mass with the lowest average attendance, we developed a collaborative Mass schedule that would allow priests to help each other, when the need arises. And the need will, most assuredly, arise.

While the priest shortage may not *seem* immediately urgent, I want to share with you a somewhat daunting statistic which we cannot afford to ignore (and which drove me, personally, to work twice as hard on this project!). With the current median age of priests in Columbus at 63, and the retirement age for priests in our diocese at 70, **half** of the available/active priests of our diocese will be at retirement age in 7 years. Holy cow! Trends like these, I think, really put into perspective the need for changes that better allow cooperation between parishes and, more importantly, provide a sustainable plan for the pastoral care of our faithful.

At the same time, I want you to know that while statistics, like that one above, may seem unnerving and even discouraging, many, many of your priests *don't see it that way*. Instead, we see this challenge as a part of our vocation: that Christ called us to be His priests **today**, in *this* time, with *these* difficulties, and with *these* pressures and unique demands. So, we intend to give everything we have, and all that we are, in

serving Christ and His Church, with the power and grace He has promised. The Lord's Sacrifice on the Cross is our ultimate inspiration, and the Holy Eucharist, which makes that same Sacrifice present on the altar, really is our surest strength and consolation. Indeed, the Cross and the Eucharist are two of the greatest treasures of our Faith, for every Catholic!

And that brings me to the final set of changes I want to share with you in this letter. In the next couple of weeks, we'll be making some modifications up in the church sanctuary. First, we will be relocating the figure of the Resurrected Christ (currently situated on the back wall of the sanctuary) to its new residence, on the distinctive, ascending wall of the northern foyer, of the Msgr. Funk Parish Family Center, right as you walk inside. The space there readily draws your eyes upward, and in a place where our parish life has so clearly expanded and grown, it seems like the perfect setting for this cherished image of our Resurrected Lord!

Meanwhile, back in the church sanctuary, we will be hanging a very beautiful crucifix, over the main altar. Why hang a Crucifix? The Crucifix is a preeminent reminder of just how much Jesus loves us. It was with an absolute, unrelenting, and unconditional love that He willingly accepted the agonies and anguish of the Cross – for us. Reflecting on this supreme sacrifice, we see the greatness of God: holding nothing back, giving Himself, totally and completely to us. Positioning the Crucifix over the altar is an ancient tradition of the Catholic Church; one which inseparably links – in our minds and hearts – the Lord's Cross with His Last Supper, the Holy Eucharist. On the night He was betrayed, Christ Jesus told us, "This is my Body, my Blood, which will be given up for you." Then, the next day – Good Friday – He fulfilled this extreme gift, by offering Himself as the saving Victim, there on the Cross.

With this essential connection between the Crucifix and the Holy Eucharist in mind, and having hung this emphatic reminder of God's Love over the altar, it seems only natural to move the tabernacle to the church sanctuary, as well. In this way, the Crucifix, the Eucharist, and the Altar of Sacrifice will literally be stationed at the "front and center" of our church, our worship, and (hopefully) our hearts. Therefore, we will be placing a new tabernacle, containing the True Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, in front of the mosaic, there behind the main altar. In that little chapel-area, where the tabernacle used to be, we will have a statue of the Blessed Mother, who is the ideal model of faith and dedication to her Son: "Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart," (Luke 2:19). The chairs for the presider, deacons, and servers will then be moved over to the east side of the sanctuary, just back from the ambo/pulpit. Thus, **the Crucifix, the Eucharist, and the Altar of Sacrifice will be at the very heart of the church** – focusing our thanksgiving, praise, and adoration, all in one place... with the Mass being the heartbeat of our parish!

There's so much beautiful meaning in all of these things, it's impossible to squeeze it into an already-lengthy letter. So instead, in the next few weeks, I've invited Deacon Jacob to write some articles to accompany these changes in the church sanctuary, in order to offer some further reflection and explanation about these gems of our Catholic Faith and our Tradition.

Incidentally, I should also add that every one of these unique treasures came from the **Catholic Jubilee Museum**, down on West Broad St. We gave a modest donation to the museum, but all of these items were essentially a gift from the patrimony/heritage of our Catholic Faith. Each of them had their own previous "parish assignments," but have now come to us to inspire a whole new set of faces and families, here at St. Pius X!

Let me conclude, then, by saying I know that change can be difficult, or exciting, or even a mix of both. So, I want to thank you for your continued patience, as we adjust to these changes, and for your enduring love of our Lord, our Faith, and our parish. You, my parish family here at St. Pius X, are one of God's greatest blessings to me, and I am so incredibly grateful to get to be your pastor.

Love and prayers,
Fr. Dave