

Our 75 historic years

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I have enjoyed celebrating Anniversary Mass in our deaneries. There has been some nostalgia about our human activities, properly so. My main role in this column is to account for Divine activities, paying attention to the rollout of spiritual energy and devotion.

Our faith stories always have a context or background. While we might think of time ticking across a calendar's date squares, they are not all the same size. We all have experienced long days and short months. Think of when you were watching your classroom clock on a Friday afternoon. The experience of time is elastic.

The ancients called time *chronos* when it is measured by clocks or calendars. But there is another way to keep time that is determined by the relation of events. The Bible measures time by *kairos*, a time of action, conversion, or transformation. This segment of time can be as short as an instant or as long as an era. It is marked by relationality. So we can measure the age of the diocese by presidential terms, or advances in medicine and technology. I know people who name years by the wars or conflicts in which our country was engaged. Maybe you have met people who measure years by naming Academy Award or Indianapolis 500 winners. I can measure our diocesan history in terms of each pope's reign since 1944.

In this anniversary year, we honor God if we measure the *kairos* by key events in our salvation history. That is, by what God has been doing during this time. For example, by calling converts, protecting soldiers and sailors, inspiring new parishes, and helping moms and dads to raise children well. Vocations to religious life and to priesthood and diaconate start small and take years to flower. God was doing that!

Certainly, the Second Vatican Council affected our history. After the tragedies of the first half of the twentieth century bequeathed awful lessons, the Church relearned to describe itself as the people of God – not as with a quasi-military structure, but with the rank stamped on us by baptism. We are still building on this major event, renewed by the Scripture-based conviction that Christ is the head of the Church, and the pope is his vicar. (Quick review: True or false, the pope is the head of the Church.)

Uniting in Heart 2030 is elaborating the pastoral impulses of the 1960's Vatican Council. Our anniversary is a time to commemorate all the men and women whose lived faith in Christ and in his church bring us to the present moment. Their hopes and struggles, prayers and sacrifices are a foundation that serve us. Very often it was their loyalty and affection for those whom they could see that helped them to know the Christ who could be difficult to make out in some tough stretches. It is this kind of time, measured by relationships, that lies at the heart of our 75th anniversary.