

Pastor's Notes: A Culture of Invitation

December 13, 2020

This Sunday, we are told to "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice!" This fits into the theme of The Joy of Tradition which I have cultivated here at the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul over the years I have been a pastor. We truly have a lot to rejoice in. But we also don't want to simply keep it to ourselves. This joy should be infectious, more infectious than any coronavirus, to say the least. What we experience here is meant for the whole world. God desires to draw all people to Himself. We are called to participate in this outreach of joy by inviting others to discover the joy of what we have received and hand it on to them. I would like for our parish to create a **culture of invitation**, in order to accomplish our mission.

You've heard me preach in the past that the sentimental phrase, "All are welcome," is a bit misleading when it comes to the Gospel. To say "wel-come" implies that all who come are, in fact, well. But the reality is that the invitation our God makes is to a sinful and broken world. He wants the sick to come to Him. So if you are "sick", then "come". We need to be inviting those who experience the brokenness of this world, so that they might experience the healing power of God's Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. We are here to help people recover their identity as beloved children of God. We are here to invite the sinner to repentance, so that they can experience the joy of reconciliation. We are here to correct erroneous visions that lead to sadness and despair, so that our hearts can be lifted up with the Good News that God wants us with Him in heaven. In order to do this, we have to cultivate a culture of invitation. Now, this is hard to do, because our traditional practices can be daunting and confusing and foreign to so many people. We know the riches they give to us in our lives, but just like many good things in this world, they require a little hand-holding and getting used to, in order to be appreciated. Many fine things in this world are acquired tastes. Not everyone can jump into a Lamborghini and feel comfortable driving it around the first time. Wearing a bowtie might feel awkward at first. Eating caviar may be repulsive to the unrefined palate. But all of these things are held up in our society as tokens of high society and distinction. We may make fun of them at times, but it's usually because we are not accustomed to them. And yet they are symbolic of the best things this world has to offer. If someone offered you to take a ride in a Lamborghini, I'm sure you'd take it. If you visited with royalty, and they served caviar, I'm sure you would take them up on that invitation. If you're invited to a formal dance or a wedding, and you are fitted out for a tuxedo with bowtie, you wouldn't say no to the bride and groom. And perhaps in accepting the invitation to do these things, you will be drawn in to appreciate why these things are held in such high esteem. The same thing can be said about the higher or more transcendental expressions of liturgy. Incense and Gregorian chant are usually not part of the common man's daily experience, and yet they are the fine things that have been handed down to us that highlight and express the most important thing: **that God is present here.**

If you invite someone to appreciate the beauty of these things, more than likely, they will. But they need someone to invite them. Not all of us are comfortable asking people we know to come to church with us; yet there are quite a few people who find their way into the Catholic Church out of curiosity, on a whim, or just stumbling in. A very easy way to create a culture of invitation is for us to be aware of the people around us. When we see a new face, go up to meet them. Introduce yourself. Ask where they're from. Invite them to coffee. If you're having a gathering, think about including them. That invitation could make all the difference in their openness to the Gospel and to our parish.

Too often, when things don't go our way, we have a tendency to get angry, sad, or despondent. We also can get caught up in the rightness of what we are doing, but express that rightness in the wrong way. Many in the traditional movement within the Church are accused of being angry and ugly. This is very ironic, because the things usually defended by the "traditional" person in the Church are beautiful and lovely. I would like us to do an examination of conscience about how we have interacted with strangers and even those who disagree with us. Have we been kind and generous? Or have we been angry and dismissive or indifferent? With this Advent season upon us, and soon Christmas and New Year, many new people will be showing their face at the Basilica. For many, it will be their first experience of "high liturgy" and traditional expressions of faith. It is my prayer and hope that as they walk through these doors and experience these beautiful things, they will also encounter friendly and kind people who will invite them into the deeper mysteries of God's love that these beautiful things exemplify. All it takes is a "Hello," a "Good morning," or an "I'm glad to see you here," to make somebody's experience of this parish a good one. Likewise, all it takes is indifference, ignoring, and lack of acknowledgment to make that same person's experience of our parish a bad one.

This problem is amplified in this time of social distancing and mask wearing. While respecting these appropriate safeguards of public health, we need to be even more bold in reaching out to those who come near us. Even before the coronavirus, many people fell through the cracks and went unnoticed. We have a need these days with the hiddenness of people's isolation, covered behind masks and distance, to take an extra effort and go out of our way to greet one another.

We are all called to share in the work of evangelization, and that starts with an invitation. So I invite you on this Sunday in which we are commanded to "Rejoice!" to rejoice in the opportunity that is presented to us here, to invite one another to a deeper relationship with God.

