

Advent and the Primacy of the Spiritual

As we begin the season of Advent this week, I would like to take the opportunity to further the theme of holding fast to prayer that I have begun, inspired by Cardinal Sarah's new book, *The Day Is Now Far Spent*. In the Christian life, the primary emphasis should be on the spiritual, and therefore the life of prayer should be our first concern as Christian people. There are, of course, many forms of praying. There are prayers of praise, like the Liturgy of the Hours. There are prayers of adoration and contemplation, like Eucharistic Adoration and the Rosary. There are inspirational forms of prayer, such as reading from the Scripture, also known as *lectio divina*. There are prayers of intercession, in which we ask God for specific needs or to intervene in specific situations. And of course there are many manners of doing each of these forms of prayer, as the whole of the history of the Church attests. As we begin a new liturgical year, now is the time to renew our commitment to the life of prayer. I would like to highlight a few initiatives that we are taking here at the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul, to emphasize and give opportunity for growth in the life of prayer among our parishioners.

Open Church

First, I would like to remind everyone that the church is open during the day from 6 am until at least 4 pm, Monday through Friday, and on Tuesdays and Wednesdays it is open until 7 pm, thanks to the service of Mr. Jason McCulley, a Knight of Council 610, who generously gives of his time to sit in the church and act as custodian. Having the church open during the day allows for people to come and make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, light one of our votive candles, or simply just enjoy the quiet of the sanctuary for a little while. If you are interested in helping us extend our open hours, especially in the evenings after 4 pm, please contact the parish office, as this is a great ministry to the People of God who need access to Our Lord in His sanctuary.

Adoration

We also offer Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament First Fridays of the month from 12:30 pm to 5:30 pm and from 9 pm Friday until 7 am Saturday. The all-night Adoration is hosted by our Hispanic community but is open to all. I would like to see Eucharistic Adoration expand in our parish. However, this requires a commitment to various hours before our Eucharistic Lord, as respect for the Blessed Sacrament and the norms of the Church require someone to be present for the Eucharist to be exposed for Adoration.

Liturgy of the Hours

You may or may not be aware that a group has been praying "Morning Prayer" from the Liturgy of the Hours, also known as *Lauds*, in the church most days of the week, following the 7am Mass. We started off with just reciting the Psalms, which form the heart of this prayer. We then moved to singing this prayer as it was originally intended in the life of the Church, using a very accessible resource called *The Mundelein Psalter*, which utilizes simple Psalm tones that are easy to pick up and follow. The renewal of this practice was called for by the Second Vatican Council in her *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. All priests and religious are obliged to pray this prayer "with and for the Church," but the Second Vatican Council heavily emphasized that the laity should also be invited to pray this public prayer of the Church. Further, as a basilica, we have a special obligation to promote the public prayer of the Church, and so it is very fitting on many levels that we offer the Liturgy of the Hours. Recently, a men's group has begun praying this prayer on Thursday mornings at 7am, and I hope one day we can expand that also to Tuesday mornings, so that Morning Prayer can be publicly prayed in the Basilica at least Monday through Friday.

In addition to this practice that has already been established, a small group began a similar initiative for "Evening Prayer", also called *Vespers*. However, for this offering, the group wanted to take a deeper dive into the tradition of the Catholic faith, and we opted to begin praying the monastic Psalter that comes to us from Benedictine tradition. We pray monastic Vespers with full Gregorian chant Psalm tones in the Latin language Monday through Thursday at 5 pm in the church; Friday at 5:30 pm in the rectory chapel; Saturday evenings after the 5:30 Mass (at 6:30 pm) and Sunday evenings at 6 pm, except when we have the *Missa Cantata*. For this form of praying, there is an element of challenge and sacrifice. The Latin language, the ancient Gregorian chant Psalm tones, and the time that it takes to pray it, are all done as an offering of praise to God. We don't do these things because they're easy, convenient, or simple. We do them precisely because God is worth our time, our effort, and even our talent. Just like we preserve opera at the Tivoli Theater a few blocks away to a populus that doesn't speak Italian or German, so, too, we preserve this beautiful tradition that has come to us as the sacred music of the Church. For those who would argue that they wouldn't understand what was being said, I would simply say: People don't go to art museums because they already understand what is portrayed in the art. Rather, being in the presence of art helps us to go deeper into the human experience, and there encounter the Divine through beauty. If we can patronize art museums, in which there is art that is not always readily accessible to our understanding, can we not do the same in our prayer of praise to God?

I hope that this time of Advent may be fruitful for you in rekindling the light of faith through prayer. I invite you to make use of the many ways in which our parish opens itself up to the spiritual life and allows the faithful to feed on the banquet the Church has provided through the centuries.

