

NOTES FROM FR. SEÁN

December 13, 2020

In Today's Gospel

Christmas is only 12 days away. It may seem odd that we do not hear about Jesus in today's gospel; instead, we hear about John the Baptist, again. John the Baptist was sent to give testimony to the light. He was sent to prepare the way for the Lord.

John was a man of great humility. Just as we heard last week, John tells us there is one coming after him, "whose sandal straps I am not worthy to untie." (Jn 1: 26b) In less than two weeks, we will celebrate the birth of Christ. We will celebrate that he who is King of the universe, the creator of all that is, entered his creation as a helpless child. Let us follow the humility of both John and Jesus as we welcome Christ into our hearts.

Laetare Sunday

The third Sunday of Advent is also known as Laetare Sunday. The word Laetare comes from Latin and means rejoice. This name comes from the Entrance Antiphon for mass on this Sunday. Although we usually substitute a hymn in place of the entrance antiphon, there is a unique antiphon for every Mass. The antiphon for the third Sunday of Advent is: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near." During this season of preparation for Advent, we recognize this weekend that Christmas is near; indeed, the Lord is near. We have the option of wearing rose-colored vestments instead of the traditional purple vestments for Advent. We do this to highlight the coming celebration.

The waiting is almost over. Christmas is almost here. There is a reason to celebrate. Each week, we see more signs that Christmas is almost here. More and more Christmas lights are twinkling in the night. The Hallmark Channel is playing wall-to-wall Christmas movies, and the radio waves are filled with Christmas carols. Let us take hope, let us rejoice as we prepare to celebrate Christmas.

Welcome Kayla

We have another reason to rejoice this year. This Sunday, one of our catechumens, Kayla Johnson, will be receiving her sacraments of initiation. Traditionally, we welcome adults into the Church at the Easter Vigil. Because of the chaos that was 2020, Kayla was unable to join us last Easter. She now has to move because of her job, but she wanted to receive her sacraments in the parish where she completed her preparation. At the 11:30 Mass at St. Mary, Kayla will be receiving the sacraments of baptism and confirmation and will join us the first time at the table of the Lord for her first communion. Indeed, this is a reason to rejoice for Kayla and for the Church.

Penance Services

Part of preparing for Christmas is evaluating our lives and removing the obstacles that prevent us from fully welcoming Christ. We must seek God's forgiveness and his grace to overcome the sins in our lives. We do this in the sacrament of reconciliation. This week, in addition to our regular confession schedule, we will have two penance services. The first will be on Tuesday (Dec. 15th) at 7 PM at St. Mary. The second will be at 11 AM on Wednesday (Dec. 16th) at St. Richard. Following a brief service, there will be the opportunity for individual confession and absolution.

Families of Parishes

As I write this, we are still waiting for the announcement of the next phase in our transition to Families of Parishes. By the time you read this, the Archdiocese has announced the formation of the Families. By now, we know which parishes will be joining us in our Family.

The Families of Parishes initiative is the fruit of the 2016 Archdiocesan Synod and Archbishop Vigneron's pastoral letter, *Unleash the Gospel*. While the Synod and the pastoral letter did not foresee such a radical shift in the Archdiocese, the pandemic of 2020 made it evident that a more radical change was necessary.

2020 has been a trying year for all of us. Many of us cannot come to Mass. For a time, no one was permitted to go to Mass. It has become obvious that we must find ways to strengthen one another, to work together to build up the Family of God. Through Families of Parishes, we will be able to take advantage of each parish's gifts so that we may better serve both God and our neighbors.

Families of Parishes are groups of parishes, generally three to six, sharing resources to advance the mission. Families have multiple priests, deacons, staff members, and volunteers who serve all the faithful within the Family. The creation of Families will enable clergy and staff to better share their gifts and talents, will allow for greater collaboration and alignment toward mission, will enable better care of the faithful, and will support a more optimal use of our limited human and material resources.

Coming together as a Family of Parishes does not mean that we will be merging into one parish, but rather each parish will better support one another as we work together to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.

View this full bulletin on the *Parish Life* tab on our webpage.