

The Paper Pulpit

(Reflections from the Pastor)

5th Sunday in Lent

Scripture: We have now reached the Fifth Sunday of Lent and we are getting closer to Holy Week. The Church asks us to make those days remaining until Easter Sunday days of pray, almsgiving and fasting. We should not let these Lenten days go by without spiritual progress. Many Christians have already prepared themselves by making a good confession. Others, a little behind schedule, are preparing during these days to go to confession. Many here at St. Max's attended our parish retreat. But there are other Christians who are not prepared, nor will they prepare, because for them Lent does not mean anything. It is like any other time of the year. So they don't think that it is a time for renewing our consciences, our criteria and our attitudes. And they don't see, or they don't want to see, that these days are for reflecting on the frailty of our human life.

Little by little, we are getting closer to Easter, a perfect time for conversion, repentance and rejection of sin. It is a time to look into the spiritual mirror. If we let these days go by without examining ourselves, without repenting, without confessing our sins, Easter will never become a reality. Lent, Holy Week and Easter Sunday will go by but it will only be a season of vain and empty rites, without meaning. Our faith will remain stagnant, without growth, and because of this, there is no way that we can grow in Christ.

This week, we hear about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. I love this story of Jesus, Lazarus, his sisters, and their friends and family. It has helped make sense of my own grieving or the grieving of a member of our own congregation at the loss of a loved one.

In St. John's Gospel, Jesus is greeted with anger. He's virtually blamed for Lazarus' death: "*if you would have been here my brother would not have died*" John 11:21. There seems to be depression all around when he arrives and maybe it irks Jesus. Martha most clearly doesn't want to face her brother's death. When Lazarus comes out of the tomb he's bound with the burial/death clothes in which his family and friends had wrapped him. He's alive!!! The point of the gospel is simple: up to this point, Jesus has performed many miracles letting others know he has the power of God. He even claimed to be God. Now he performs the ultimate miracle (other than Easter): he raises another from the dead. Death is never easy, but it is inevitable.... we will all die. Death is part of life. Before we can reach our final destination in heaven, we must complete our life on earth.

Our Lord tells us, "*Jesus is the resurrection and the life and anyone who lives and believes in Him will have eternal life,*" John 11:25. Notice that it is not enough to believe in Jesus as our Savior, but we must also live it. It's faith put into practice. Then Jesus asks the big question: "*do we believe it?*" John 11:26. My brothers and sisters in Christ, the fundamental element of any Christian is his/her beliefs and relationship with Jesus. If we do not believe what Jesus, the Bible and the Church tells us, then we are not worthy of eternal life. For those who believe, live good lives and repent (through the Sacrament of Confession) are worthy of eternal life.

I would also encourage you to read John's gospel, chapter 6. Jesus gives us a teaching on the Eucharist. He says, "*whoever eats my Body and Drinks my Blood abides in me and I in him.*" Jesus goes on to say "*whoever Eats my Body and Drinks my Blood will live forever.*" There are so many folks in my generation (in their thirties... ok, ok in their 40's... ok in their 50's) who do not come to Mass. I had confirmation interviews and I am astounded at the number of parents who do not take their children to Mass. What scares me is that most of my parent's generation do go to Mass. If you know someone who does not attend Mass and their parents do, that person has broken the covenant with our Lord. To a person, the covenant is broken. They give every excuse: I got to sleep in, my kids have a tournament, etc. They think "Jesus understands." Do you know that in the scriptures Jesus speaks of a banquet, a couple who is getting married asks Jesus if they can be excused. Jesus does not excuse a couple who gets married from the obligation to receive Eucharist. Why would he excuse someone for a ball game? Or sleep in? Our Lord is pretty clear—no Eucharist, no heaven. So many in my generation say all we need to do is be good and that Jesus understands. This tells me they don't know Christ. They think they do, but they don't. Good people don't go to heaven, faithful people go to heaven (and hopefully faithful people are good). Want to go to heaven, then you must LIVE (your faith), BELIEVE and RECEIVE. Anything less and you are just fooling yourself.

Parish retreat: Thank you Fr. Patrick Foley for hosting a wonderful parish retreat. We had a good number of people show up each night with lots of good food. Fr. Foley does not receive any compensation for coming beyond his expenses (and a collection taken on Wednesday evening). Thank you for the ladies PCCW for paying for his travel expenses. If you are a woman in the parish, are you a member of the PCCW? Why not? I have asked the ladies to be "spiritual mothers." So far, they have paid for our adult bible studies and the retreat. Thank you ladies!

Diocesan Annual Appeal: We made it! Thank you to all who contributed. This is the first time in the history of the parish we made our goal. Thank you! I don't have the exact dollars at the time I'm writing this article, but will give an update next week.

Ever thought about becoming a deacon? Deacons are a great asset to any parish. We are blessed to have Deacon Rich to serve us here at St. Max's. As great as he is, wouldn't it be wonderful to have several deacons in the parish? There is a retreat coming up on May 2-3 at St. Anthony's Retreat Center (located less than an hour from St. Max's) for those who ever considered being a deacon. See Deacon Rich (or myself) for more information. No need to commit. What could it hurt to learn more? I have been known to bribe folks in the past. So here is one: Any man in the parish who attends the retreat will be served a steak dinner at the rectory for him and his family.

Sincerely in Christ, Fr. Jim Trempe