

From the Pastor

My Family

Back to School, Work Our family is continuing to count on your prayers after the sudden loss of my brother-in-law on October 18. Mary, my sister, went back to work last week in the accounting department of Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital in Lincoln. Will, my nephew, returned to classes at Pius X High School. These returns to regularity, of course, are good for one's human handling of the shock of what has happened. The tendency to despondency and discouragement are shaken off when one determines to return to the regular routine. As for me and my brother and parents, I believe we are reaching out to Mary more and praying fervently for her and William. I was able to visit Mary last Sunday after completing my weekend duties here. That was a good visit, with some genuine brother-sister time for the both of us.

What Just Happened? It remains, and will continue to remain, odd to even utter the words, "My brother-in-law died." Many of you share the same experience. The awkwardness is brought into focus when one encounters people who are occasional acquaintances and therefore have no real way of knowing of the loss. To explain to these people the situation can re-release the emotions and make the question arise in our hearts, "What just happened to my brother-in-law?" Yet, each new time to explain what happened, to share our sad news, gives a chance to heal more. And it gives the listener an opportunity to exhibit the compassion which is so helpful in times like these.

New Outlook on All Souls' Day As I offered Holy Mass for All Souls' Day on Thursday, it gave me a new outlook on Bob's soul. Because of our belief in the sacraments and indulgent mercy of the Church, we have every reason to know Bob is already in Heaven. But if he is in Purgatory, I am praying for him in a special way during this month of November dedicated to the Holy Souls. The Holy Souls in Purgatory are already in God's gaze, and they will enter Heaven as their purification is completed. Their gaze is not ready to return the look of God yet. St. Catherine of Genoa said in her lifetime that a soul entering God's presence before it was purified of all effects of sin would cause that soul great injury. I liken this idea to someone pulling a muscle such that they would have to limp through a game or a sports season. They are not ready to really RUN until their pulled muscle is healed. So must our souls be healed. I use the occasion of my devotion to praying for Bob's soul as a reminder to all of you that Purgatory is Real! We ought to pray every single day for the Holy Souls that are receiving their final preparations for eternal life with God in Heaven.

Trust Enough? The question that I am asking myself about Bob's death is: do I trust in Jesus enough? It is one thing to say that I trust in Him; it is quite another to have the sudden seismic shaking arising from Bob's death to give me the chance to trust truly. As I pray and meditate on our new family situation, I realize that words of saints come back to me. Somewhere I have heard that God never moves away from us. It is us by our lack of trust, our lack of unitive love, who move away from Him. I am determined, by God's grace and your prayers, to trust truly and love unitively (if that is a word) more and more in these days following the loss of our family's loved one. Thank you for being on the journey with me and us!

Seminary Speaking I was asked to give three conferences and a Mass homily to the seminarians at St. Gregory the Great Seminary in Seward last weekend. It was an honor to be asked. The occasion was what is called "Cassock Day." The seminarians who are new to seminary studies receive their cassocks on this day, and so a retreat-like experience is provided for them. I was the guest speaker for this retreat. Around 50 men are studying at Seward to become priests; about half of them are from our Lincoln Diocese. I used my talks to them to interweave my own seminary experiences from over two decades ago with themes of courage, brotherhood, and loving the Church. It was a quite rewarding experience to spend time with the seminary community. I stayed there overnight on Friday, which necessitated cancelling our Saturday morning Mass last week. Please pray for the men studying to be priests; they are good men, and our prayers truly help them!

Trick-or-Treaters! Being new, I didn't know what to expect from the Halloween line-up of trick-or-treaters. I didn't count the number of doorbells, but it was more than I thought I would receive. I enjoyed seeing the young people who came by. I would estimate that about half or a little more were from our parish...it is ok with me that our young people consider the rectory to be an easy candy stop! I saw Wonder Woman twice, a princess or two, and superheroes and other cute costumes. It was fun!

Census I am looking forward to further discussion with you in our parishes as to the census numbers for Mass attendance which we published last week. Combining the data for the two parishes for the two weekends the census was taken, we have 38% Mass attendance. One of the large parishes in Lincoln reported 51% attendance. In my parish experience in Plattsmouth the past several years, we were around 45%. In diocesan priest meetings, it has been reported that across all the parishes, our Mass attendance has been decreasing about one percentage point per year. While our diocesan average

has been higher than in some dioceses, we always want to be giving the Good News of Jesus and His seven sacraments to as many people as we can. I have heard of countries in Europe, like my own motherland of the Czech Republic, where Mass attendance is at an abysmal 1% among Catholics. Other European countries are a little better, but most would be elated if they saw 38% of Catholics coming to Mass, as we have here in St. Mary's and St. Joseph's. I want to reach out to the Diocese to see what the trends are for our Mass attendance over the past decade. The Bishop uses these Mass attendance numbers when he makes his visit to see the Pope, which generally happens about every five years. It gives the Holy Father a universal perspective on the whole world of Catholics, so that he can help us all to be better Catholics. The main point to take away from this paragraph for now is that I ask you to be joyful in your faith, to love and live your Catholic faith more and more. This begins in your own home; examine yourselves on the Christian witness that you give to those who you spend the most time with. I begin with myself in stating that all of us can do better in giving joyful witness to Jesus.

Contraception, Why Not? I am going to blurt something out: a teenage girl in a former parish I served suffered strokes last year due to a birth control pill which had been prescribed to her. Mothers and fathers, please be vigilant on what treatments your daughters and sons receive for various ailments. Jesus Our Lord wants us to treat our bodies as living temples of the Holy Spirit. To be a temple, we must physically care for our bodies. A contraceptive mentality in our society brings much selfishness. A contraceptive mentality sees the other person as one whom I can use. A contraceptive mentality is socially acceptable. People who do not use contraceptives are looked upon with wonder, or sometimes with scorn. My former parishioner has recovered from the traumatic time of these strokes and is, I am sure, seeking more healthful medical advice. Studies show that Catholics use birth control (contraception) at the same rate as other faith communities and society in general. But for those Catholics who truly understand and live the Gospel message of using our bodies as God intended, the life of living in Christ is greatly fulfilled and rewarded. Many Catholic resources are available to help us live our calling from Jesus to treat our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. A great resource I would direct you to is: www.OneMoreSoul.com.

Living Liturgically

November 9 On this day, we celebrate the Dedication of the Church of St. John in Rome. It is a day when we remember the consecration of our local churches as well. Each Catholic church is consecrated by a bishop upon its construction. On

this day, we could attend Holy Mass or make a visit to a Catholic church and thank God for giving us a beautiful place to worship. We could in our families consider if our children and grandchildren know the location of the following: altar, ambo, tabernacle, crucifix, presider's chair, sanctuary lamp, and many other church components.

November 11 This day is the ancient feast of St. Martin of Tours. He is a wonderful saint who was also a soldier before being named a bishop. In sacred art, he is sometimes depicted with a goose at his feet or in his arms. This is because he did not want to be named a bishop and a flock of geese temporarily hid him so that he would not be able to take the office of bishop! To live his feast day liturgically, we could pray for all those who serve (or are service veterans) in the military by saying special prayers for them, or singing a patriotic hymn with our children or grandchildren. We could also pray for our bishop and all bishops. Our diocese used to have a parish named for St. Martin, located west of Deweese in Clay County. The parish was commonly called "Loucky". The church still stands, but it was unconsecrated upon its closing in the early 1970's. The parish I served in Deweese still maintains the St. Martin Loucky cemetery as a beautiful place of final rest which is often used by many local people.

Thanksgiving Masses Does your family have the custom of attending Holy Mass for Thanksgiving Day? My family always went to Mass on this day; it just felt right. If you don't have this custom, how about starting it this year? We will have a Mass on Wednesday evening at 6:30 p.m. at St. Joseph in Giltner for the Eve of Thanksgiving. The Thanksgiving Day Mass will be at 9:00 a.m. in St. Mary's Aurora.

Cemetery Indulgence From the Church, we can receive an indulgence for visiting a cemetery from November 1 through November 8. We gain the plenary indulgence for a soul in Purgatory. All other days of the year, the cemetery visit receives a partial indulgence. You pray for the dead, if only mentally, when you visit the cemetery. The other requirements of the indulgenced act are as usual: to go to Confession, receive Holy Communion, be detached from any love of sin, and pray for the Holy Father's intentions.

God Bless You!

Father Grell