

## From the Pastor—February 11, 2018

**Funeral for Nick** We were all so grief-stricken by the death of 17-year old Nicolas Pachta on Feb. 2.

**Aurora** This young man is the son of Dan and Jaime Pachta, and is the middle kid to siblings Ashley and Mitchell. Dan's dad, John Pachta, gave a moving testimony at the Rosary vigil on Tuesday about how this family chose to move to Aurora and raise their family here. The idea of a young family living out their marriage vows and giving themselves over to a community for their kids to grow up in was very moving to me. Indeed, any relationships any of you have formed with this family is directly a result of Dan and Jaime coming to live in Aurora so many years ago. It is the way that God ordains for marriage and family life to be the leaven of society. And the wide-ranging effects of marriage and family life lived in this way showed in the way the Aurora and surrounding area communities came together to support this family in their dire need.

**My Pachta Ties** Dan is the youngest of five children...well, he is a twin with his sister, Patty, and I am not sure which of them was born first. The twins' older siblings are Bob, Teresa, and Sharon. The Pachta family grew up south of Bellwood and attended Aquinas and St. Mary's Catholic School in David City. I met Sharon when I was a student at UN-L. We are about the same age, and we have struck up a long-lasting friendship since 1990. I have been to the farm that Dan grew up on; I probably met Jaime back in those days, too, as she is also a Bellwood native. Her maiden name is Nicolas, which is the name they gave, creatively, to their first-born son. Sharon, Dan, and their siblings have an uncle who is a priest, Father Rudy Oborny. He has been the pastor at Sacred Heart in Hebron for many years. A couple of nuns are also in the family, on both the Pachta and Oborny sides.

**Priest and Father** How does a priest react to the death of a young person? I walk into the situation, and try to bring Jesus there. I pray. I pray a lot. I console, I cry, and I become bewildered as everyone else. I laugh when fond memories are shared, and I as quickly head into sadness again. I plan the next steps. Like you, I don't really know what to say. So in the Pachta House last week, I did a lot of just sitting there, fingering my Rosary beads, and being present to the family. Even though, as I wrote above, I have known the Pachta family for some time, I came to know Dan and Jaime, and Ashley, Nick, and Mitch a lot better over these past grief-filled days.

**The Services** I was so proud of the devout Catholic faith shown by the Pachta family. Sometimes, one hears of reactions to a youthful death, or sudden death, with little if any gathering together as a church family. But isn't the calling of a church family precisely to join together at these times? Our St. Mary's church family sprang into action in the planning and preparation for the Rosary/vigil and the funeral Mass. A lot of people from a lot of other church families in our community came together as well. We experienced our brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ. We experienced our common childhood with God the Father in a way that was profound and showed the deep-rooted faith in this community. I salute you all and am proud of you. We came together as

the Body of Christ. Our help in common was even more necessary due to the snowy, cold conditions which came about on Sunday through Wednesday. I thank all who prepared our sidewalks and parking lot for the crowds who visited Nick's family at church. Joining me for the funeral were the aforementioned Father Oborny, as well as one of my predecessors here, Father Dennis Hunt of Morse Bluff. In addition, Father Bernie Kimminau was here from David City. A fifth priest, Father Ben Holdren from Bellwood, probably would have been here, but he had committed long ago to attending a conference out of state. The funeral dinner was held at the Farr Building on the Hamilton County fairgrounds. If you add up the visitation, Rosary, and funeral Mass, easily over 1,000 distinct people passed through the doors of our church.

**Youth and School** To you young people who know and love Nick Pachta, my heart is with you. I know that your hearts are heavy, and that you have feelings that you may have never experienced before. Us grown-ups may have some experience of these types of feelings, but trust that we have no better idea of how to handle them than you; we just have some previous encounters with this because of our longer lives. We as adults stand beside you, and cry. I am so grateful to the administration, faculty, and staff of Aurora High School. Our school (and indeed, most schools) is equipped with a Crisis Response Team which we hope we never have to initiate into action. But the team is present and has a plan, and it carried out the plan in a professional and loving way. I would encourage you young people who know and love Nick, or even if you don't know him that well, to take your feelings to the teachers who you know best. Talk to them about your feelings. I hope you talk to your parents, too, but sometimes these types of feelings are very appropriate to bring to a favorite, trusted teacher. If you want to talk to a clunky, middle-aged and balding priest (me☺), I would be happy to give you a kind ear. My offer goes out to our Catholic kids, or any other kids who knew Nick.

**My Role as father** I was lifted up by many prayers in preparing to be the father of the funeral services. I appreciate every prayer very much. I was moved to speak about the Chronicles of Narnia in my funeral homily; I especially like the "further in and further up!" image that C.S. Lewis gives in the last volume of the seven-volume series. Also, I had recently heard on Catholic radio a quotation that Mother Angelica used to help counsel a person. It was from a famous poem, The Hound of Heaven, by Francis Thompson. (I said at Mass that since the author used the image of a hound dog, we could for the day rename the poem "The Husky of Heaven" ☺). The line that Mother used and I borrowed from her was this, as spoken by God: "All which I took from thee I did but take, not for thy harms, but just that thou might'st seek it in My arms." You might enjoy dwelling upon this poem of 182 lines some time. I appreciated people giving me compliments for being the father at such a time as Nick's death. Ultimately, though, I felt mostly as a little child myself, the son of my own mother and father, and I was glad that I have such loving parents who have taught me how to love others.

**Forward** I am no psychologist, but I do know that we do not want to avoid speaking of Nicolas Pachta. His

family, I think you will see, will want you to mention him and to speak of him and to show your love for him. An outpouring of love has been shown these past days; but don't forget to continue your love for the Pachta's in four weeks, four months, four years, or four decades from now. We will grasp each other's hands and walk lock-step forward with this family into the unknown future. We will trust in Jesus Christ. Yes, we will trust in Jesus Christ, even more than ever before. Behind the veiled presence of Jesus' Face in the Eucharistic Host, we will be joined with Nick and all the holy people of all time until we meet them all again. This is our faith, and this is the time to live it, even though our legs may feel weaker than spaghetti and our hearts may literally hurt. God will take care of us.

**Spirit Catholic Radio Dinner** I think many of you know that we are blessed with Catholic radio in the State of Nebraska. In fact, ours is one of the first Catholic radio stations in the country, having begun broadcasting in 1999. Our local signal at 91.5FM is not always as strong as we might hope, but it is received well driving around in your cars, trucks, and tractors. Our network, called Spirit Catholic Radio, held its annual celebration dinner recently. I was glad to attend it. I think that nearly 1,000 people were in the huge banquet room that night at an Omaha hotel. We enjoyed a good meal and received a "State of the Network" address by the CEO, Jim Carroll. Even though the Spirit Catholic Radio Network reaches almost 90% of Nebraska's population, it receives no funding from the three Nebraska dioceses. (It also covers southwest Iowa and a portion of the LaCrosse Diocese in Wisconsin.) The network operates on the prayers and donations of people like you. The guest speaker for the celebration dinner was Dr. David Anders. His program, Called to Communion, airs each weekday from 1:00-2:00 p.m. He is a gifted speaker, and it was great to hear his address of his love for the Catholic faith and his support of Catholic radio. Please read more about him at the newspaper of the Omaha Archdiocese at this link: <http://catholicvoiceomaha.com/news/radio-talk-show-host-tell-compelling-conversion-story>

**Holy Family Shrine** While I traveled to the Spirit Radio celebration dinner, I stopped and prayed a while at the Holy Family Shrine near Exit 432 of I-80. I think many of you have seen it from the interstate, and perhaps some of you have visited there. It is a peaceful place to pray, as one can see the non-stop whirring of six-lane I-80 traffic while being in the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. I recommend this sanctuary of prayer to you if life ever takes you toward the Gretna area.

**Knights of Columbus Clergy Dinner** Each year for many years, the Knights of Columbus hold a dinner for the clergy of our diocese. I was able to attend the dinner last week at the Cathedral of the Risen Christ in Lincoln. Bishop Conley and Bishop Emeritus Bruskevitz were there, as were many priests. In addition many future priests were there from St. Gregory the Great Seminary, Seward, and Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary, Denton. It was a beautiful evening of being together with the Knights and brother priests and seminarians.

**St. Blasé Throat Blessing** I bestowed last Saturday evening the blessing of throats of St. Blasé. That day, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, was the liturgical feast of this saint.

Perhaps some priests gave this throat blessing to their congregations on Sunday at Mass; I did not. While the blessing, without making the Sign of the Cross, can be given by an Acolyte, I didn't make provisions to prepare to have our Acolytes help me for the weekend Masses. So, I only gave the blessing on Saturday night.

**Living Liturgically** Let's all pray for each other to enter prayerfully into Lent this week. Remember, the word "Lent" means "springtime". We hope to wake up our souls from any winter hibernation of inactivity so that we can light up our darkened world with living and zealous lives of faith. Traditionally, Catholics are taught to "give up" something for Lent, making a sacrifice of chocolate or coffee. But probably more profitable for our souls is what we decide to "take up" for Lent. It could be extra Bible reading, extra time meditating on our Rosary beads, or simply being quiet more often, turning off the artificial lights of near constant screen-time and the endless audio stimulation into our ears from many devices, and choosing instead to simply talk to God. We should also all promise to pray for each other in this holy season.

**Avoiding Meat at Tournaments** In the coming weeks of Lent, Catholics of age 14 and older live by the discipline of abstaining from meat on Fridays. This Catholic law can be made difficult when many upcoming Fridays are full of athletic and academic tournaments, meets, and conferences for our high school aged youth. I encourage you to think ahead of your Friday plans, and be sure to resist the urge to order a hot dog or hamburger in the concession stands provided at these events. I would hope that most of these events consider our Catholic faith and offer a meatless option. I love these events themselves, such as the State Basketball tournament, but I think we need to know that such events don't automatically excuse us from living out our Catholic faith.

**Tom Osborne Addendum** I mentioned last week how I encountered Tom Osborne recently at the Aurora Mall. I was told that Coach Osborne has a house on a nearby lake resort. So perhaps that is the reason I saw him, and perhaps it is not so uncommon to see him in our area. That is kind of cool!

**Good Friday** *[re-printed from last week]* I want to mention a word about Good Friday, which falls on March 30<sup>th</sup> this year. Good Friday is a great day to keep free on your calendar. Try to avoid extra activities, especially if you are in a position of organizing activities for people of any age. I remember one of my past parishes where Good Friday as a day off from school was used by a sports team for practice. To me, the sports should have taken a backseat to families being quiet and prayerful, together, at home and at church. So, I want to encourage you now to do what you can to keep March 30<sup>th</sup> as a day to meditate and keep a quiet demeanor as we observe our Savior's death upon the Cross.

**God Bless You!**  
**Father Grell**