

Dec. 24-25, 2016

Thoughts from the pastor,

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! We say that to each other but I always wish there was some ways I could make it more of a reality for more people. Years ago when I worked as the Director of Pastoral Care at Bergen Mercy Hospital I would be a part of the orientation for new employees. One of my messages was to help people learn how to greet people. Many were used to a greeting like: "Hi, how are you?" But immediately after saying that, they would walk right on by. I tried to help them understand that a hospital is a place where we needed to be focused on how people were. When you are dealing with your own health problems or the problems of a loved one, it can hurt to have someone ask how you are and then ignore you.

I would tell them, if you are in a hurry, just say hi. But if they have a moment they should ask how they are or how things are going and then stop for a moment to listen to the response. I warned them that at first many people would be shocked that you really wanted to know. Some people would still simply say, "Fine." Others might really need someone to notice the difficulties they are facing. The hospital was a place in which we were supposed to have people who could deal with many of the issues they might be facing.

A parish church is much like a hospital. Sometimes my office is an emergency room for ones who are struggling with more than they can handle. Each pew can be like a hospital room. There can be people who are facing physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. There can also be people who have faced similar situations and might be the one to give support or lead a person in pain to someone who can help. Many times the biggest thing that we can all do is be a friend and an intercessor by our connection with the Lord and our prayer.

As I think about how I wish I could do more to help people in need, I know that, as a priest, I can do a lot in just the ways I have mentioned. I also know that, like those days as a hospital chaplain, I can't do it by myself. I needed others to help. Maybe one of the most important things I can do as a priest is to keep encouraging you to take a moment with the people in the pews around you and be a part of their Christmas cheer. And as we start a new calendar year, it might be the perfect New Year's resolution to greet and meet the people who are a part of this parish family.

Next Sunday is the Feast of Mary the Mother of God and New Year's Day. Usually on New Year's Day there is no 5:30pm Mass. Because it is a weekend of two-fers, the weekend schedule will be a regular Sunday schedule: 5:30 Saturday and Sunday evening, and 8:00, 9:30, and 11:00 on Sunday morning.

I hope you take the time to see the new Nativity figures in the church narthex. They have been a knitting project by Darleen Montague and are meant to be child friendly. This weekend the three wise men and a camel are coming from the east and are about as far as the Mountains of Moab. They are actually on a bookshelf east of the crib. In two weeks they should be at the manger. Darlene and I, and all the parish knitting group hope that these nativity figures and the nativity window will inspire young and old to remember the reason for the season.

In two weeks, we will have a St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish pizza and game night in honor of our patron Saint. It will start right after the 5:30pm Mass on Sunday, 1/8/17. We encourage you to bring an old deck of cards or a board game that you might like to play with the children. We ask a donation of \$5 per person or \$20 per family. It is a time to get to know new people and renew acquaintances with longtime friends. Maybe it would be good to bring a new friend.

God bless you,  
Fr. Frank