

Sept. 23-24, 2017

Thoughts from the pastor,

First of all, the Bible Study has started. Those of you reading the chapters should be on day 8 on the Reading Guide. That means that this Sunday you should be reading Chapters 10-11 of the Book of Genesis, Chapter 8 in the Book of Psalms, and starting Chapter 6 of the Gospel of Matthew. We had a great crowd for the first day last Sunday. Because of an extra activity in the Parish Hall we met in the Church. Most of the time we will be in the Hall and not the church. I apologize that the notes did not get on the website until the middle of the week. Blame the evil computers. Hopefully it will be ready sooner in the coming weeks.

The painting of the exterior of the Church is finished. It looks really nice. The last part of that project will be to replant a couple small patches of grass that were damaged with the soda blasting that was needed to prepare the main support beams for painting. There is still interior work that will be done near the skylights and in the narthex to repair some areas that have been damaged from leakage. This will be done after the skylights are installed, which is not scheduled for a couple months. The painting was done by Jake Kurtz Painting, of Bennington. I am still waiting on the stained-glass windows.

The air-conditioning project for the church part of the facility is underway as I write this. I don't know if it will be totally done by this weekend.

The other news that I want to fill you in on came out in a newspaper article this past week. Fr. Nick Mishek, who was ordained this summer, has been working at St. Roberts. It seems he upset some people by asking questions that some people considered inappropriate. He was hearing confessions for the middle school children. I'm not going to get into details because there are other issues that I believe are more important in this situation.

The people involved are children, their parents, all priests, and the Archbishop and his staff. When priests hear confessions, we are to guide the people we are working with to help them receive forgiveness for their sins, but we are also directed to guide them to greater holiness. Parents are charged with protecting their children. The Archbishop is to be a guide and shepherd of both the people and the priests. Sounds easy, right? Not anymore.

Our children are being pulled into the very dangerous territory of pornography and sins revolving around it at younger and younger ages. It is not that unusual for priests to hear third and fourth graders confessing having watched "R" and even "X" rated movies. What some of them are seeing on phones are another thing. It doesn't have to be their phone for it to be a problem. For that reason we try to guide these children and their peers away from danger. That is a very delicate area because some children are still very innocent but are in the near vicinity of the danger. Priests have to tip-toe around this a lot. That is another reason why I write about these issues of sexuality in my letters and not deal with them in my preaching.

Like the children, parents are all over the board in how they perceive this issue. Some seem to be oblivious of some of the influences in their homes, others are very vigilant, and everything in between. Guiding children in the midst of this is very difficult for priests but very necessary. If it happens in the wrong way in can make the child feel very uncomfortable. If it happens too

late, the child can be spending the rest of their life struggling with horrible habits and even addictions.

Our newly ordained priests are apt to make some rookie mistakes. Because of fear, some might not end up very helpful. Because of enthusiasm for the faith, some might push too far in the eyes of some people. If someone complains, the Archbishop needs to find a way to deal with it. When he does, he faces many difficulties. The first is the concerned parent. In the current climate of fear and suspicion, because of scandals dealing with priests in the past, he can be seen as harboring a predator priest if he doesn't do enough. If he does too much he can even get to the point of kissing any new vocations goodbye. No one will sign up to work with a bishop who throws priests "under the bus" at the first complaint that comes to him on a priest. Those are the extremes but it doesn't have to be at those extremes for priests to be very gun-shy. After the scandal most priests don't want to hug or be hugged by anyone because it can be misread too easily. And yet we are supposed to be a father image for people. An ice cold father isn't very effective.

So what do we do in a climate that is so charged with fear on all sides? We need to pray and work with calm and level heads. Rash judgments get everyone in trouble. If anyone is expecting a parent, a priest, a bishop, or anyone else to be perfect, they are going to be sorely disappointed. Even businesses can't be firing people for every flaw. We need to work on recreating an environment in which people are less likely to jump to horrible conclusions and more likely to give people a chance to improve and grow. This pertains to everyone. I sure know that I am not perfect, so I don't expect that perfection from others. I will be praying for Fr. Mishek as he works through this trial. I know that he still wants to serve God as a priest. I hope he can do that for many years to come. I hope and pray the Archbishop will find him another assignment that will give him a chance to learn from mistakes and become an even greater priest.

I realize that I also have a very selfish motivation in this. I want there to be good young priests like Fr. Mishek around so I can retire someday. I want to be able to continue recruiting young men and women to serve God in the Church as God is asking. I don't want their parents to have to be terrified that their sons and daughters will be crucified before they get a chance to get started. But I also want children to be safe. For these reasons I want to emphasize that we need to deal with problems in healthier ways. We can all be like our politicians, who seemed to be paralyzed and unable to act to solve problems like DACA because no matter which way they turn they feel like they will be crucified. We live in a strange world.

In order to end with some good news I can give you some preliminary picnic results. It looks like we made just short of \$31,000 on the parish picnic this year. Included in that is over \$10,000 that Baskets & Bundles brought in. The lottery brought in over \$38,000 but subtracting prize money and other lottery costs, we made about \$24,000. The rest of the picnic brought in over \$2,000 but the costs were closer to \$6,000. That is because of things like meals for those who bought lottery tickets. But this did leave us with the \$31,000. This is still lower than last year's \$35,000, but is still good news.

God bless you,  
Fr. Frank