

Jan. 13, 2019

Thoughts from the pastor,

Fr. Marcus Knecht is the Associate Pastor at St. James. Many of you have met him, but he will be saying Masses here occasionally so I wanted to make sure you recognize him. He is easy to spot because he looks a lot like a young Abe Lincoln. He is the one doing the 11am and 5:30pm Mass this Sunday as I drive to Chicago for my class at Mundelein Seminary. I will be back Friday afternoon.

The celebration of our Patroness St. Elizabeth Ann Seton last Sunday was delightful. We had about 200 people at the pizza party. It looked like everyone was having a great time. The concert went very well. The Santos family children are great entertainers. They are great musicians and for those of you who are old enough, might be able to imagine David as the incarnation of Jack Benny. David is nine. After the concert we had the open house at the rectory. I estimate that a couple hundred came through the house. I may have to do that again. I think it is helpful for children to see where priests live. It is the same as how important it is for young men to see what a seminary is like. Many people have very weird ideas of what seminaries might be like. Granted there were some strange happenings in seminaries years ago. Now it is more typical dorm life, but there are important variations. The spiritual life is emphasized more than in a typical dorm or college.

The living quarters for priests vary a lot. The attached house at SEAS is very different than the rectory at Holy Name, where I was before SEAS. Holy Name's rectory was a lot older and built for a religious order, the Redemptorists. Even the house at St. James is different, especially since the offices are right in the same space. As we look at less priests being available in our Archdiocese over the next years, I believe it is helpful for the mystery of what a priest's life is like to be opened up a lot more.

One of the notions that many people have is that priests are very likely to be lonely. This comes from the idea that we aren't married with children. I have made a point of observing levels of loneliness. I know married people who are very lonely. I have watched single people that are never lonely. Most of loneliness comes from inside of a person. If a person is afraid to reach out they will be lonely. It is risky to extend yourself toward others if you are feeling vulnerable. Children go through this as they grow up. If their first experience of reaching out results in being bullied, they might be afraid to try again and they might become a loner. If their first attempt at reaching out creates a friend, they will have that experience as a buffer against a bully. The attack of that bully, in trying to make them feel worthless, will not work because the child already knows that someone cares for them.

This is a helpful lesson in terms of how we think of the Church. We are told that Christ loves us even as we are sinners. I explain it in that God the Father has made it clear that He wants each one of us to be a member of His royal family in heaven. So when we enter a church we should realize that we already have a friend there. This should give us the courage to reach out and offer friendship to others who might be struggling. We should never feel lonely in church, and even if we are having a down moment, we should be encouraged by God's love to risk reaching out to others and find more friendship. So if a priest is lonely it may be because they haven't understood this very well. This can happen at times for priests when they are feeling vulnerable.

God bless you,
Fr. Frank