

Christmas Week!

Christmas Week is here! Our Advent season draws to a close with these late Advent weekdays. Our sense of joyful anticipation and excitement reaches a fever pitch as we have been preparing our hearts for the coming of the Lord! Since this week will begin a period of varying degrees of time off from school and work, I hope families can take the time to decompress and spend some quality time together. Many people say that the week in between Christmas and New Year's is the best time of the year, and I tend to agree: the slower pace, the catching up with family and friends, and the spirit of Christmas joy that pervades these days truly make this "the most wonderful time of the year."

You have read my writings about keeping Advent, and not letting Christmas creep in too early, but starting on the evening of December 24 is the time to go whole-hog with Christmas! Remember, the traditional "twelve days of Christmas" are the twelve days after Christmas leading up to Epiphany. As of Christmas Eve, we are full-blown into the liturgical season of Christmas Time. Let's all make the most of the holiness, solemnity, cheer and good feeling of the season!

No 12:15 p.m. weekday Mass on December 24

Please note that, because it is Christmas Eve Day, there will be no 12:15 p.m. Mass (and also no Confessions following) on this Tuesday, December 24. Thank you for your understanding.

Be nice to the crowds!

As you well know, Christmas is one of the days of the year when our church attendance swells as people who come to church only once or on a few occasions a year are with us. I am a firm believer that it really is not helpful for us "regulars" to make snide comments or to look askance at them; that's really not a Christian attitude. Yes, I truly believe it would be better for all those folks to be at Mass every Sunday, but we must not be judgmental. All we should do is welcome them and be glad they are with us. One thing is for sure: if they receive a rude comment or an impolite stare from us, they definitely will not be back anytime soon! We

should go out of our way to be warm, welcoming, and helpful. That's what the new evangelization is all about, after all.

So, let's not be cranky over the crowds. Don't be upset if someone who comes only once or twice a year takes "your" seat. Be patient if the parking situation is a little crazier than usual. Remember what Christmas is all about and spread the Peace of Christ to one another — especially to the folks who are not regulars. When we do that, we really are being the best we can be in Christ toward one another, and we will be taking a big step forward in bringing out the Christ in each other. Thank you for your patience and good humor with this!

Handicap Parking Spaces

You may have noticed that we have added handicap parking spaces alongside the church building. We hope this further assists those who may need such parking, and this is part of our efforts to respond better to those with special physical needs. Work will also be done with some special seating arrangements in the church (who knows — by the time you read this it might already be done, and, if not, it will be coming soon). In addition, some work will take place in the Spring, once the cold weather passes, to make the concrete at the side entrances to the church easier to navigate for those with canes and walkers. Remember, too, we have the automatic door at the handicap entrance for those with wheelchairs.

I ask everyone to continue to be solicitous and accommodating to those with special physical and mobility needs as we welcome them into the church and as we are attentive to their needs for seating and movement.

Silence during Mass

I hope that during these Advent days you have had some time to cultivate some silence in your life, and to create a little space of preparation where the Lord might enter more fully at Christmas. It seems that more and more we are losing the ability to be still and be silent.

As you know, the ritual of the Mass has a rhythm built into it which includes periods of silence, for private reflection. These times are: after the introduction to the Penitential Act,

when we are called to “acknowledge our sins;” after the priest says, “Let us pray” before the Collect; after each of the readings; after the homily; and after the Communion Procession and singing end (we should all be singing during Communion, and then together take time for silent prayer once the Communion Procession and singing end).

The priests are conscious of trying to leave time for silence at these periods. What is your reaction to these periods of silence? They are not moments just to sit or stand idly, passively waiting for the next thing to happen; rather, they are meant to be moments of prayer and reflection, focusing on a particular aspect according to when the silence takes place.

It is important for all of us to be in tune and in touch with the rhythms of the Mass, including the times for silence, since, as you will recall, we do not pray **at Mass**, but rather we **pray the Mass**.

Ideally, there is time for silence before and after Mass as well. In reality, this gets a little tricky, especially since our parish does not have any kind of a gathering space for people to assemble outside the worship area. On the one hand, we must always keep a reverent tone and disposition in the worship space and create an environment where others can enter into prayer and reflection. On the other hand, there are legitimate needs of fostering our communal life together that make absolute silence in the church difficult. Generally speaking, I think common sense and an awareness of being in sacred space will help everyone to have the appropriate behaviors and volume of voice proper to the sacredness of the worship space.

Thinking Parish, and the Offering of Self

I would like to continue a few thoughts that I began last week concerning how all of us are called to think beyond our own little corner and instead to see things in terms of the whole parish. The reason for this is, of course, centered on the Sunday Eucharist. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy reminds us: “But because it is impossible for the bishop always and everywhere to preside over the whole flock in his Church, he cannot do otherwise than establish lesser groupings of the faithful. Among these the parishes, set up locally under a pastor

taking the place of the bishop, are the most important: in some manner they represent the visible Church established throughout the world. And therefore both in attitude and in practice...efforts must also be made toward a lively sense of community within the parish, above all in the shared celebration of Sunday Mass.” (42)

Our belonging to the parish, then, is not merely some legalistic or paperwork formality; it is an expression of who we are as Christians belonging to the Body of Christ as part of the visible structure of the Church. All of our efforts, then, individually and collectively, should be ordered toward supporting and building up the life and mission of the parish as together we seek to evangelize and bring the Good News of Christ to the world. It is wonderful and good that we have so many different ministries, organizations, societies and clubs — they are signs of life in the parish — but we must always remember that they do not exist unto themselves. Their goal and purpose is not to build up any one society or organization, but to build up the life of the parish. Their goal and purpose is not to simply increase membership in this or that group or organization, but to increase participation in the life of the parish. Their goal or purpose is not simply the mission of any one group, but the mission of the parish as all groups serve the larger mission.

This outlook should also color our understanding of what it means to participate in these ministries, groups and societies. Recall that I frequently talk about how we do not have “volunteers” in the parish, but rather **offerers**. Volunteering has the connotation of doing something at one’s convenience, on one’s own terms, simply because one wants to. Without in any way diminishing or denigrating volunteerism, which is a wonderful thing, I think service in the Church has to be something more. It is more about **offering** oneself in union with Christ because to do so is a response to the call we have received as baptized Catholics to give our lives away to others in union with Christ. Thus, we **offer** not at our own convenience, but because **each and every person is needed** to build up the life and mission of the parish. Deeper than one’s own little corner of what one

likes to do or feels like doing in a very limited view, seeing oneself as **offering oneself to the common good of the parish** becomes a profound spiritual expression of prayer and love that gets us to grow beyond ourselves and our own little world. This spirituality reaches its zenith at the celebration of Mass as we bring **the offering of our lives** and unite that offering with **Christ's offering made present.**

As parish leaders, and as a parish as a whole, we will continue to explore these themes of unity and the common good of the parish in the upcoming months.

In conclusion...

Together, let's aim high in Christ.
Together, let's bring out the best in each other.
Together, let's be the best we can be in Christ.

And let's always remember: LOVE IS A GIFT.

Sincerely,