

Return to Ordinary Time

Last Monday we returned to the liturgical season of Ordinary Time. Technically speaking, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, which we celebrated last Sunday, is the First Sunday in Ordinary Time, and so this weekend we celebrate the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time. Ordinary Time continues until the Lenten season begins on Ash Wednesday, this year on March 5.

By “Ordinary Time” we do not mean “ordinary” in the sense of commonplace or banal; rather, the word refers to “ordinal,” *i.e.*, we are counting the Sundays throughout the year. During Ordinary Time, we do not focus on any single particular aspect of the mystery of Christ, but rather on the Paschal Mystery in its entirety. The Sunday Scriptures continue to unfold for us the mystery of Jesus Christ as we continue to be challenged with the meaning of His mission and His ministry.

We have these weeks of winter Ordinary Time, then, to enter into the mystery of the Lord’s death and resurrection as that Paschal Mystery is made real and present and effective for us at every liturgy. We should use these weeks well and enjoy a certain routine and “normalcy,” for when Lent comes, we will have to be about the serious business of deeper prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Solemn Entrance at the Presentation of the Lord

One special celebration during winter Ordinary Time occurs on a Sunday this year, and that is the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, always commemorated on February 2, and this year replacing the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Forty days after his birth, the child Jesus was brought to the Temple in Jerusalem in accord with the Law of Moses. It was here that Simeon, a just and righteous man inspired by God’s Holy Spirit, recognized Jesus as the Anointed One, the light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Israel.

The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord is also called Candlemas Day, because of Jesus being declared by Simeon as “light” and “glory” for the people. The day is associated with the blessing of candles and with processions with candles.

Here at OLPH we will mark the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord on February 2 by using the Solemn Entrance described in the Missal as the form of entrance at all the Masses Saturday night and Sunday. The assembly will hold lighted candles for a special introduction to the Mass and blessing of candles, and blessed candles will be available to take home at the end of Mass. Taking these candles would be another great example of linking your prayer at home with the prayer of the Church, the Body of Christ, at the communal gathering.

A fuller explanation of the meaning of the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, or Candlemas, will be given in next week’s bulletin as a special insert; please look for it. We hope you enjoy celebrating this special liturgical day in this way. We are continually trying at OLPH to open up the richness and fullness of our liturgical celebrations and of the liturgical year, and in this way we hope to become more deeply immersed in the mystery of Christ.

Leaving Mass Early

I have been asked to address the issue of people leaving Mass early, and I am happy to do so.

First, let me define “leaving early.” To my mind, leaving any time before the assembly has finished singing the closing hymn is leaving early; after all, the Body is engaged in an action of communal singing, so to leave before then is to leave too soon. Yes, as a liturgist, I know that technically speaking Mass is over as soon as the priest or deacon gives the dismissal, but in terms of the ritual, a closing hymn takes place, and is therefore part of the action. To leave before that action is complete is to leave too soon.

Now, let’s ask some really “bottom-line” questions. I suppose it’s possible that someone may have a legitimate reason for leaving early, but, other than a medical emergency (your own or a loved one’s you have been called to), I really can’t think of too many. So here are the questions: *Is leaving Mass early REALLY necessary? Does it REALLY save you that much time?*

I think that people who leave Mass early misunderstand the nature of Mass as a communal action where everybody is called to enter into the ritual actions TOGETHER. Mass

is not about “Jesus and me” and simply “getting what I want;” that represents a consumerist, if not a selfish, mentality whereby once a person gets what he or she came for — *i.e.*, Holy Communion — it becomes OK to leave. Especially reprehensible is the practice of partaking of Holy Communion and then going right out the door; again, other than a sudden emergency, I can see no excuse to justify that.

So, if you’ll allow me to be blunt, leaving Mass early is just plain rude: it’s rude to the Lord, and it’s rude to one’s brothers and sisters who are entering into the act of worship. It’s not the best we can do, and it’s not the best we can be. Mass is supposed to be the center of our week and the most important thing we do in life as Catholics. Waiting until it is completely over is really asking very little. We need EVERYONE — ALL OF US — to give 100% to our worship, so that we can inspire one another, lift each other up, and give each other the witness of our faith.

If you know someone who leaves Mass early, maybe a gentle reminder to them about the importance of staying to the end would be helpful. It can be a reminder that **we are responsible to and for one another as members of the Body of Christ**. Let’s help each other be the best we can be in Christ; let’s help each other be the best we can be at liturgy together!

VIRTUS Training

With the new year upon us, OLPH is making a concerted effort to be in 100% conformity so that everyone who offers himself or herself in service at OLPH in any ministry, society or organization has completed the diocesan-mandated VIRTUS training course. This is something that is to be taken with the utmost seriousness. VIRTUS training teaches adults about the hallmarks of a safe environment for children and helps adults to recognize the warning signs of an unsafe environment.

At OLPH we are instituting a **deadline of April 1** as the time by which all offerers at OLPH will have been expected to take the training. This involves those in ALL ministries, organizations and societies that in any way might need to do this training because they might in some way be near or around children,

even if they do not work with children or if children are not part of the group or its work. I thank everyone involved for their cooperation with this undertaking, which is mandated by the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

Also, I wish to give a special **THANK YOU** to Jean Bjork, who is graciously offering her time and talent as the Coordinator of VIRTUS for the parish. It is a monumental task with much record-keeping and much interaction with all the heads and leaders of the parish groups. Jean does a wonderful job with it and is totally committed to keeping OLPH where we should be in this regard. Great work, Jean, and thank you!

March for Life

Allow me to give a special push to our parish’s participation in the March for Life, which is this week, on Wednesday, January 22. OLPH always attends, and I would like to ask you to consider attending if at all possible.

The March for Life is an important witness given to our government and our society about the sacredness of all life from the moment of conception. With prayer and faithful witness we stay confident that one day all will come to understand the sacredness of life and that abortion will become a thing of the past. We can be proud of and grateful to the OLPH parishioners who offer their time and their presence to be part of this crucial event.

Further details and information about how you can participate in the March for Life can be found elsewhere in this bulletin.

Telecare Telethon

This weekend I will again be participating in the annual Telecare Telethon. I will be on Telecare from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. on Sunday night, and I have been told that during that time, probably around 7:30 p.m., we’ll be highlighting and showcasing the show I currently co-host with Bishops Brennan and Pérez, *Insight*. Be sure to tune in if you get the chance.

On the subject of television, I wish to thank everyone who has mentioned that they have seen my show *Insight* and enjoyed it; I appreciate your support and I’m glad you find the show to be pleasing and entertaining.

9:30 a.m. Mass: Get ready for the Children's Liturgy of the Word!

We've teased you with its arrival, but it really is coming soon: current plans call for the Children's Liturgy of the Word to begin on March 2nd. We hope to be able to stick to that date. The Children's Liturgy of the Word will provide a means for children from first-grade and up to participate in the Liturgy of the Word (the readings and the homily) at Mass in a way that is geared toward their understanding. So, hang in there...it will be here before you know it, and more detailed explanations of the Children's Liturgy of the Word will be appearing in the bulletin in a few short weeks. Watch for it!

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,