

Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

Our liturgical celebration of Christmas Time continues as we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord this weekend. Today is rich in so many themes that continue to unpack for us the great mystery and wonder of the Nativity of the Lord: the wise men being guided through darkness by the light of the star; the star itself as a miraculous sign leading to Jesus; the meaning of today as the “epiphany” or “manifestation” or “revelation” of God not just to Jews, but to Gentiles — to the whole world — showing us that Jesus came to save all people; and finally, the mystery that God is revealing himself in human flesh.

Keep in mind that a beautiful devotion associated with Epiphany is the blessing of homes. It is customary to mark the doors of the home following in the steps of the Magi who, according to tradition, are named Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar. Inscribed in chalk over one or more doors are the numbers of the new year, along with the initials of the Magi: 20+C+M+B+14.

This week, on the pew ledges throughout the church, we have provided for you a special card which can be used for this Epiphany blessing of your home, a card that gives not only a prayer of blessing, but also the numbers and initials, such that, if desired, this card can be affixed as a placard above a doorway to serve as the blessing of the house in place of writing in chalk.

I urge every family to take time for this special prayer together.

Liturgical Celebration as Epiphany

As we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany, the liturgist in me cannot help but reflect on how every celebration of liturgy is an epiphany. By that I mean that in every liturgical celebration, especially the Mass, the Risen Lord Jesus makes Himself known to us. Christ is already there, present in liturgical celebration, and through the ritual actions He reveals Himself and we are swept up into the salvation He brings to us through His Paschal Mystery. Each and every liturgical celebration is a profound encounter with the crucified-risen Jesus as He is present to us sacramentally, and thus present to us in a way that is not true of

other times and other places. That’s why, for us as Catholics, sacraments are so vital to the life of faith and to our spirituality.

“Why do I have to go to Mass? Can’t I pray on my own? Won’t God listen to me?” is a refrain we often hear from people. The fact is that we do need personal prayer and private prayer, and not only is it OK for us to talk to God on our own, but we should — and He does hear us! **But for us as Catholics, that’s not enough; there is more to it than that. We are a sacramental people.** There is an encounter with Christ, as we enter into His Paschal Mystery (His dying and rising) which is made real and present and effective at Mass, the likes of which do not occur elsewhere. We need to be at this particular celebration of His presence each and every week — the weekly Sunday Epiphany, so to speak — in order to nurture and grow in the fullness of the relationship that we are called to. It’s kind of a “bottom line” answer: praying to God on our own is absolutely necessary, but for us as Catholics it is not enough; weekly attendance at Mass is not just something nice that we should do when we can, but rather it is an absolutely essential and irreplaceable component of our relationship with Jesus and our immersion into His life, a component centered on our weekly participation in celebrating the Eucharist and receiving Holy Communion.

Thank You for Christmas Gifts and Goodies

Over the Christmas holiday many people send gifts, especially baked treats and other goodies, to the rectory for the priests to enjoy. Allow me to take this opportunity, on behalf of all the priests, to say **THANK YOU** to everyone who sent along gifts for all of us. We appreciate your taking care of us and thinking about us, and your expressions of love and good wishes helped to make our celebration of this season very joyous and meaningful. Know that all our parishioners are regularly in our prayers.

Special Religious Education

I have to take a moment to acknowledge and say **THANK YOU** to all who work in our Special Religious Education program. On Saturday mornings we are so privileged to have a program of religious education for children

who have special needs, and it is an extraordinary program which has a long and proud history here at OLPH. Week after week the teachers and offerers give of themselves so lovingly to these special children who are so close to our hearts. They do a remarkable job!

I was particularly impressed by a special program performed by the children on the Saturday before Christmas. They enacted the Christmas story using a very clever motif of several "stations" something like a "living museum." The children were so proud to make their presentations to all of us visitors and it was obvious that their teachers were very proud of them as they worked with the children. My heart left there very full of joy that day at the great things that are being done with these special children.

We want to always be there to assist families with children with special needs. These children are a vital part of our parish family and they and their families are always welcome at everything that goes on at OLPH. As you know, we have started the Special Needs Mass once a month, and we have this long-running Special Religious Education Program, and also a Special Needs Committee meets regularly. OLPH truly is a beacon of hospitality for these special children and their families. **THANK YOU** to everyone who offers himself or herself on our Special Needs Committee. Also, I would be remiss if I did not give an extra-special **THANK YOU** to Jane DeGirolamo who coordinates our Special Religious Education so lovingly, so expertly and so faithfully. Jane is doing an amazing job, and I, along with the entire parish, am extremely grateful for the offering of her time, gifts and talents in this way.

Census Coordinator

Some weeks ago I asked if anyone would be interested in coordinating the massive undertaking of the Parish Census that we will have to be doing in the near future. I was pleased to receive several responses from people all of whom were extremely qualified and generous. I am happy to report to you that Colleen Ullmer has graciously agreed to be our Census Coordinator, or, our "Census Czar," as I like to humorously refer to the job. Thank you, Colleen, for offering yourself in this undertaking. This

will be a tremendous asset to this parish as a new and updated census will help us to minister to the people of OLPH in a more effective way. Colleen and I will begin meeting this month to discuss getting the project started; you will be hearing more about our OLPH Census over the course of this year.

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

Next Sunday we conclude the liturgical season of Christmas Time with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. We will mark this special Feast in two ways. All Masses next weekend will begin with the Rite for the Blessing and Sprinkling of Water, as a way of remembering our own Baptism. Also, we have invited all families who have celebrated a Baptism at OLPH during 2013 to attend the 9:30 a.m. Mass so we can offer them a special blessing at that Mass; hospitality and refreshments for everyone will follow the Mass.

This event at the 9:30 a.m. Mass on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is one of several events throughout the year that are run by our Family Life Committee, under the direction of Debbie McDonough. Debbie and the committee members work very hard to create many different events with a family focus that welcome both current and new parishioners and build up the communal life of the parish. I personally am very grateful for all they do. This occasion on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is a perfect example of their ministry as OLPH is reaching out to keep contact with families of recently-baptized babies so that we might continue to support them in their important vocation as parents and keep them connected as much as possible to the life of the parish.

Happy New Year!

On this first weekend of the new calendar year, allow me to take this opportunity to wish everyone many, many graces and blessings in the year ahead. As I look back on the blessings I have been given over the past year, I certainly count being able to serve as your Pastor as among the top blessings for which I am extremely grateful. I promise to continue to serve you as best as I can, and to continue to work with the Pastoral Staff, the Pastoral Council, the Finance Committee and all

the heads and leaders of our many ministries, societies and organizations so that TOGETHER we will continue to build this new and revitalized spirit and energy we find at OLPH. There are many initiatives we have on the drawing board to begin in the year ahead: our parish census, mentioned above; following up on the Membership Engagement Survey we took in October; we need to continue to enhance our liturgical celebrations, particularly with weddings and baptisms on the agenda; and, most of all, we want to continue to build up our UNITY AS ONE PARISH, not as isolated or individual ministries or endeavors, so that TOGETHER we are giving witness to Christ as members of His one Body.

Happy New Year!

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,