

On Eagle's Wings

St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church
January / February 2018



From the Pastor

There is a prayer that is on my wall in the office that I look at every day. It was a prayer that was given to me by a dear priest friend of mine who sadly died of cancer. As I was looking for something to share for this Eagle's Wings I stared at this prayer. I think it is something that might hit home as this new year begins. So, I would like to share it with you. The prayer is by Thomas Merton and it is entitled, *Thoughts in Solitude*.

"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone."

As you look at this prayer of Merton, you might be thinking, "What in the world does that have to do with the new year?" Or perhaps you might not agree with the thoughts, and that is okay. I get a true sense of peace when I pray this prayer. God doesn't call me up on the phone and tell me his game plan for my life. But I do get a true sense that

he is always around in small ways, giving me insight. People have come into my life and given me advice that helped me head in the right direction. It is interesting; two of my closest friends have at one time or another shared this prayer with me. Each one was at a time in my life when the directions were not as clear as they could have been.

I guess, for me, each time I pray this I feel a sense of genuine peace. I believe that in the midst of the storm, there is a light that gives a path to follow. So, maybe, this prayer could be something that gives you direction as well. The new year offers so many new possibilities for each of us. How we navigate this year depends on how much we allow God to be part of our lives. The saying, "God is my co-pilot," shouldn't be the approach that we take. It should be, "God is the pilot," so that we take the lead from him. But that is not always easy to decipher, hence my turning to Merton's prayer often.

As we begin this new year, may we trust that the Lord is ever-present in our life. We might not be getting text messages or e-mails from the Big Guy, but he is always there. We just must find the best way to listen to him. We must do our best to follow the will of the Father. I believe he will not let us down. Make this year a year centered on the Father and his unconditional love. God bless each of you. I continue to be blessed to be the Pastor of St. John.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Don West".

Father Don West
Pastor

From the Business Manager



Welcome to 2018! We have many blessings to count from last year. Thank you to those parishioners who shared their time, talent and treasure with us in 2017. We had a great festival, our third "Night of Service" was bigger and better than ever and we finished the Pavilion remodeling. Our parishioners, as always, are some of the most giving to outside organizations. We were able to give in meaningful ways to St. Vincent de Paul, St. Leo the Great, Campton Mission and Religious Retirement (to name a few). We baptized 64 children, had 75 first Eucharists and 67 Confirmations. We are a busy parish and it shows! We are blessed by our parishioners.

As many of you know, our parish budget calendar goes from July 1 to June 30 each year, so we are just past the halfway point in our fiscal year. At the time of writing this article, we are about 8% behind our budgeted income from weekly giving. That is a big number! Weekly giving accounts for 85% of our annual income. Please prayerfully consider how much you are giving. Even when you aren't here, we still have bills to pay. Giving electronically is the perfect way to "set it and forget it". If you are interested in setting up your regular contributions electronically, it is easy to do. Just click on "Donate/Payment" button on our website and follow the instructions. As always, if you ever have questions about giving, I am always available via phone, e-mail or in person!

During the first quarter of 2018, we will be having a Stewardship Weekend at all of the Masses. We will hear some stewardship stories and encourage all parishioners to look at how and what they give to our parish community. All that we have we receive through the grace of God. We are the keepers of his treasures. Make sure to share of your gifts from God through giving your time, talent and treasure to your church.

If you would like to give to St. John with a stock donation, that would mean a lot to us. Donations of stock to St. John Church are processed through our individual custodial account at Fifth Third Bank. To donate stock to our parish, please make sure to include the information below in your communication. Please note: the Archdiocese of Cincinnati Gift Acceptance Policy requires a donor name be included with the transfer. All stock transfers without a donor name and a recipient account number will be rejected and returned to the donor account.

Company Name: Fifth Third Bank
Account Number: 010447175IBV

DTC Number: 2116
Account Name: St. John West Chester

If you have any questions, please contact Marianne Ball in the parish office at 777-6433 ext. 119 or mball@stjohnwc.org.

Have a blessed 2018! I continually pray for our parishioners. For 2018, I will pray daily for the health of mind and body for all in our parish community. God has called you by name, you are His! Share God's love with one another.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joan", written in a cursive style.

Joan Seibenick
Business Manager

Lent: Six Weeks of Opportunities

We hear often that Lent is a time of introspection and reflection, a time for deeper prayer, for fasting and abstinence, and for more deliberate almsgiving. As Catholics we embrace Lent as a period when we find more time for our roots, our attachment to a loving God, to our families and communities. For some, Lent can be the spiritual equivalent of New Year's resolutions—we tend to our spiritual exercises at a more vigorous pace and we struggle to rid ourselves of the secular “fat” that confuses us and weighs down our hearts. Lent can be all of this and more.

We pray for the catechumens and candidates who are journeying toward full initiation into the Church at Easter Vigil, and we also pray for Catholics who have fallen away from the rich traditions and practices of the faith. During Lent, we can try to take an extra minute or two to raise the spirits of those around us, especially those who seem to be searching for a way back into the Church. Think of Jesus and the woman at the well; although Jews and Samaritans did not normally share conversation or time, Jesus not only accepted a drink from the Samaritan woman, but he took time to speak with her. You know the ending of this narrative: the woman went out and told everyone she met about Jesus. Perhaps we could also share the Good News more often.

There are more ways to open our hearts to the opportunities of Lent:

- We can celebrate the Eucharist with intentional participation, gaining “pounds” of spiritual nourishment. We can celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, shedding “pounds” of guilt from sin and poor choices.
- We can pray the Stations of the Cross. We can embrace the cross of Jesus, wash the feet of others, and build hope in our salvation through Jesus' resurrection.
- We can take time in our family lives to give, grow, abstain, and pray together. We can fast from more than food; perhaps we can move away from the glowing screens for some time each day. Avoiding distractions allows us to build convictions!
- We can practice a positive form of restraint—taking the challenge to avoid excessive consumption, waiting for non-essentials, purchasing fair trade items to help our global neighbors. We are surrounded by temptations; restraint helps us to grow stronger as followers of Christ. Even Jesus was tempted!
- Wherever we go, we can check our egos at the door, putting the common good in front of being right. Humility shows strength of character.
- We can say good bye to addictive behaviors and obsessions, instead trying to replace them with service to others.
- We can give our minds and hearts a workout—by working toward unity, by giving to those less fortunate, by tending to the sick and lonely. Keeping our hearts open to God's grace helps to open our eyes to the needs of others.
- We can help to build up the Kingdom of God by looking in the mirror and recognizing our gifts and talents, then experiencing the joy that comes from sharing them.
- We can be more grateful—for life, for our families, for those with whom we work and play, for a loving God who knows us intimately by name, who hears our needs and answers our prayers. We can offer kind words and gestures, smiles, simple prayers, all day, every day!

Lent is our opportunity to seek out ways to solidify our identities as sons and daughters of God. Like most of our daily activities, this will require planning. Include the whole family on decisions. Spend forty days seeing yourself as wonderfully created, but needing the unceasing help of God. We are all incomplete, growing disciples, so allow time to blend the “ordinary” of every day with the “extraordinary” of walking with the Lord, making Lent a season of opportunities.

Mary Montour

Mary Montour
Pastoral Associate of Children's Faith Formation

Why Ashes on Ash Wednesdays?

Soon it will be February 14th. Couples will express their affection for each other by giving chocolates, flowers, or if less romantic, a toaster. If we look at these rituals with a clinical eye, we could think to ourselves, "how strange..." The rituals we use on St. Valentine Day are meant to evoke our deep love for someone else, in a way that words alone cannot convey.

Psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists tell us there is one clear universal truth for all cultures: the use of ritual. It has been discovered that even the Neanderthals made use of it. Clearly, we have a need for it.

Symbolic gestures are a way for us to communicate ethereal realities that we cannot directly see or touch, like love, forgiveness, and appreciation, to name a few.

The same is true for our religion. Our sacramentals such as holy water, ashes, and the like, are ways to raise our awareness about divine realities such as God's presence, God's mercy, and God's forgiveness. Our "senses fail to fathom" spiritual realities, as St. Thomas once wrote. This "side of heaven" is something that we can only see through the "eyes of faith".

For Catholics, and many other Christians, February 14th will also have a religious significance because it is Ash Wednesday and begins our Lenten journey. Jesus spent 40 days in the desert praying and fasting (Matthew 4:2, Mark 1:13, and Luke 4:2) in preparation for his public ministry. Similarly, we spend 40 days in the "desert" praying, fasting, and almsgiving to prepare ourselves spiritually for Easter and the renewal of our baptismal promises.

Why do we begin Lent marked with ashes? For the Hebrew people of biblical times, ashes had a religious meaning. Beginning in Genesis 2:7, we are told that Adam was formed from dust or clay. In Genesis 18:27, Abraham tells God "I am but dust and ashes". Jeremiah describes death as a "valley of corpses and ashes" (Jeremiah 31:40). Besides reminding them of their mortality, ashes were also seen as a sign of contrition. The people of Nineveh (Jonah 3:6,10) and Daniel (9:3) cover themselves in sackcloth and ashes to proclaim their repentance.



It is this biblical notion of ashes we recall when we are marked with them on Ash Wednesday. The ashes indicate to us what the season of Lent is all about: mortality, repentance, and conversion. May our time of self-sacrifice during this penitential season praying, fasting, and almsgiving prove fruitful to help us grow in faith. Then, come Easter, as we are sprinkled with holy water to recall our Baptism, may we sincerely profess our faith in Jesus Christ.

Jerry Barney
Jerry Barney
Deacon

Be Patient, We are God's Work in Progress



Each year, thousands of people vow to follow new resolutions in their lives. They want to lose weight, eat healthy, start exercising or maybe even start using their turn signals (this is a West Chester thing, I'm sure of it!). There are as many resolutions as there are stars in the sky. But, do we ask ourselves, "What would God like me to change?"

Recently, I have found myself becoming more jaded and critical of others. I wonder, is this what older age brings about? Why am I doing this? I yell at people when I drive, I judge others in an instant. I hold people in disdain. Certainly, this is not what God expects of me. Of course, no one is perfect. But, this is getting to be too much. As I was walking forward to proclaim God's word at Mass last week, I thought to myself, "I am not worthy to be sharing the good news!" It hit me then. I need to ask for forgiveness more often. Only God can see into my heart and only he knows when I am truly sorry. As I was walking to the Ambo to read from the New Testament, I could feel the grace of God upon me. I know that my God is a forgiving God.

I think that each one of us has a faith journey all our own. None of them are a straight path. No one ever reaches perfection. There are hills and valleys, highs and lows in all of our lives. There are times when we really doubt our God and times when we see clearly that he is holding our hand as we walk our path. We need to be patient with ourselves. Just as God loves us and forgives us and tries to lead us along, we must also try to listen carefully to His word. We are each a work in progress. God is working in us and through us and wants us to succeed.

Recently, a dear friend of mine has been experiencing very serious health issues. She has become an inspiration to me. Her faith is so strong. Her spirits are high. She is truly being patient with herself – with her body and her mind. Her faith is being truly tested and she is acing this test. I hope that I can be more like her. She is truly hearing God's call in her life.

So, for this year, I have a new resolution. I must be patient; not just with others, but also with myself. I must listen harder for God's voice in my life. I must look for his imprint on my heart. Be patient with me, for I am a work in progress – a work of God! I pray for all of St. John's parishioners to be patient with themselves. You are all worthy of God's love. Have a blessed 2018.

Joan Seibenick
Business Manager

Update from St. Gabriel Consolidated School

By: Nicole Brainard, Principal



Saint Gabriel

Happy New Year from the St. Gabriel Consolidated School Community to our extended community at St. John the Evangelist! Enrollment is now open for the 2018-2019 school year for all grades kindergarten through eighth grade at St. Gabriel. Whether you are deciding where to enroll your kindergartner or looking for a new school setting for your child, we would love to meet you and answer your questions! As St. Gabriel Consolidated School is the parish school for St. John, parishioners are given priority registration for the upcoming school year.

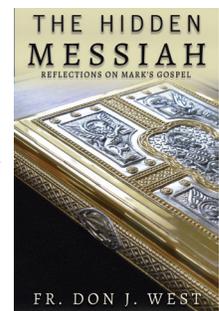
The academic foundation that begins with kindergarten can be critical in setting your child on the best possible educational pathway moving forward. For small children in particular, the New Year can be a blank slate. An education based in our Catholic faith leaves an indelible impression. If you are considering enrolling your child in a parochial high school, statistics show there is an advantage to ensuring they are enrolled in a Catholic elementary school for at least a portion of their elementary experience. Our Open House is scheduled for Wednesday, Jan. 31, 2018 from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

We would love the opportunity to give you all a tour of our school. Tours are available at Open House on Jan. 31 or by appointment. Openings for grades other than kindergarten are limited. More information about our religious education program, our academic programs, including gifted programs, and our award-winning extracurricular programs, is available on our website at www.stgabeschool.org. If you would like to speak with a St. John parishioner with children in our school about their St. Gabriel experience, please contact Mrs. Amy Gutman in our Main Office at (513) 771-5220 and we will be happy to put you in contact with a parent ambassador.

Please know the St. Gabriel Consolidated School children, faculty and staff will continue to keep you all in our prayers throughout this New Year. May God's blessings upon you be too numerous to count.

Purchase Father Don's New Book, *The Hidden Messiah: Reflections on Mark's Gospel* today!

These gospel "conversations" help us to understand what Jesus offers us and to accept the challenge to hear the calling to be the people Christ calls us to be; people who will share God's love with others. These reflective books on the Gospel of Mark will make great Christmas gifts, so be sure to pick up a few in our Parish Office for only \$10!



Congrats!

*To Those Who Received the
Sacrament of Baptism:*

10-22-2017

Beckett
Wietmarschen

Savanna Battles

Porter Rybak

11-4-2017

Arianna Henning

11-12-2017

Evelyn Nicholas

Andrews

Venturato

11-26-2017

Charlotte Murphy

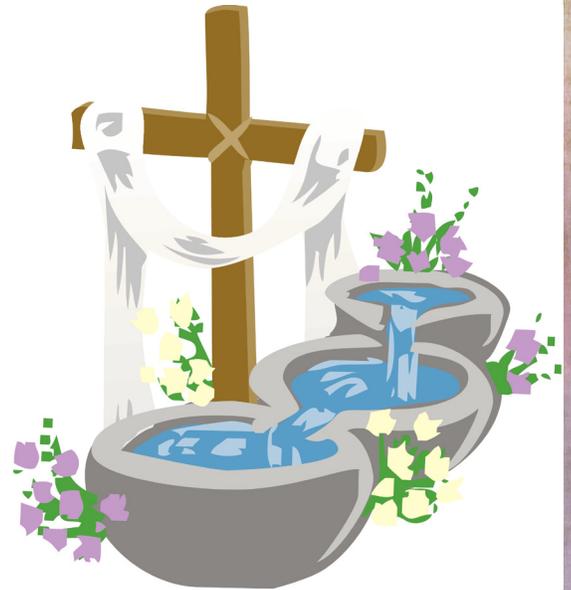
12-3-2017

Nora Todd

12-4-2017

Profession of Faith

Brayden Auguste



Our Prayers and Sympathy go out to ...

October

- The Hamm family on the death of Al Hamm
- Nancy Wyspianski on the death of her cousin
- The family of Marcy Krendl

November

- Columba Kuzman on the death of her brother
- Sharon Lipic on the death of her mother
- Renee Niehaus on the death of her brother



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