ANNUAL STEWARDSHIP TALK

BAPTISM OF THE LORD 2016

HOMILY

OUR BAPTISM COMMITS US TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

works of charity that you make possible with your time and energy as well as your monetary gifts. We are feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, counseling the troubled, and making it possible for folks without health insurance to experience healing, and we are doing much more – all on a daily basis and even on an hourly basis.

As you may have guessed, this is my annual Stewardship Message. Today we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord which marks the end of the Christmas Season. Jesus’ Baptism by John was a sublime act of humility because, since the Lord was sinless, he had no need of repentance. Our Baptism into Christ calls us to imitate his meekness by adopting an attitude of profound thanks for all God has given us and expressing that thanks by sharing what we have to make our community and even the world a better and holier place. In the words of the Prophet Isaiah in today’s first reading, we have the awesome challenge to be a “light for ... those who live in darkness” (See Isaiah 42: 6-7).

So here’s what I’m asking of everyone. I prayerfully request your continued support of the weekly offertory during 2016. The offertory is what the parish needs to keep our many programs and services going for another year. In addition, I also ask those who have not yet made a pledge to the “Reaching for Tomorrow Campaign” to make one. I invite you to consider the suggested giving levels, but don’t be discouraged by the giving amounts if you can’t donate at that level. Pledge to the best of your ability per month or per quarter over the next three years. The beauty of pledging over time is that it allows us to project the potential we will receive and help reach our goal quickly. Again, we’re not asking for the full amount now, just the pledge amount. You have up to three years to fulfill your commitment. We need to attain our goal in pledges within the next couple of months so that we can begin this summer. Every household will receive a mailing in the next few days. Please take time to read it prayerfully and respond with a generous heart. Then please return your pledge envelope within the next few weeks.

Like me when I was growing up, we all were the beneficiaries of what our parents and generations further back had sacrificed for the parish we belonged to – wherever that parish was. This tradition has to continue or there will be no Catholic Church. Please join me in “Reaching for Tomorrow.” I have made my pledge. I ask that you too make a pledge soon, as so many others of our fellow parishioners have done. In doing so, you will help ensure the continuation of the holy work of handing on the Gospel of Christ in the Catholic tradition.

Enclosed within this mailing is an offertory renewal card, a school building campaign brochure, a campaign pledge and a return envelope. Please review all of the enclosures, complete your offertory card and pledge card with a generous heart. Place your cards in the envelope provided and return it through the collection basket, by mail, or drop it off at the Parish Office. Please return your envelope within the next two weeks.

Thanks again and God bless!
This was my homily message at all Masses on January 9 & 10, 2016.

When I was in the sixth grade in 1954 at Immaculate Conception School in Clintonville, our parish began a huge building project to add classrooms and a new gym. This was to keep up with the famous “baby boom” after World War II which was just starting to add to elementary school enrollment throughout the country. I and my younger sister were born just before this boom, but it was now affecting us. My sister was in the fifth grade that year and I will never forget that, for the first semester, she was in a classroom of 80 kids. It was so tight in there that there were aisles only between double rows of desks. I would peek in now and then in sheer disbelief that this was happening. Of course we had mostly sisters for our teachers and the “normal” classroom size throughout my time in grade school was from the low 50s to the mid 60s, so 80 was not too much more of a stretch. At the end of the first semester, the new rooms were ready. Imagine the relief of the poor nun who had to put up with this. Somehow it all worked. A few years later, another round of building completed the look of the school which continues down to this day. One of the exciting additions in the first phase was the new gym which was then available to me and my sister in our “junior high” years – and also available to our younger siblings and later generations. I am sure some of the young parishioners at Mass today have played in that gymnasium – and maybe some not so young too.

Remarkably there were no fund drives for either of these additions. Nor did we even pay tuition. I remember that there was only a “book bill” of about twelve dollars a year for each child. You see, we had mostly sisters for our teachers and they really worked for next to nothing. And the offertory simply covered all expenses, including building expansion. The parish had already built the original school in 1925 and, incredibly, a new church during the Great Depression in the mid-1930s for $125,000 – the church that is still there. Whether there were any fund drives for these projects, I don’t know. By the way, I would not trade those years at I. C. School for anything.

Fast forward to today and to Westerville. As you may have heard, we are in the midst of a project to expand and renovate our St. Paul School – a project we call “Reaching for Tomorrow.” The concept is to construct a second story over a large part of the current building to create a space devoted to the Junior High students. This will enable us to continue to be an attractive Catholic School option in our community. This would be the first phase. The second phase would be the badly needed renovation of the existing school structure, some parts of which are over fifty years old now. The end result will be an exciting new school with a great look that will accommodate all the new programs which have been added over the last few years under the leadership of our principal with the collaboration of the top-notch St. Paul teachers. This essentially new building will also enhance the programs and operation of our excellent Parish School of Religion by enabling us to offer classes for all grades K through eight on both Mondays and Wednesdays. This way a family could have all grades available on either night and make only one trip per week.

Unlike at Immaculate Conception of my boyhood, we need to have a fund drive – which has already begun. The Catholic School landscape has changed dramatically since the 1950s. We no longer have large numbers of teaching sisters available; those days are gone – and, as good as those days were, it’s ok that they are gone. Sisters do other good things now. Other changes have also made this a new era in Catholic education, but an era where such education is still a great blessing and gift from God. Right now we need additional pledges to reach our Phase I goal of $5.7 million. Already we have a great start with $3.6 million pledged, and so we would like to generate another $2 million in pledges over the next couple months to keep us on track to begin construction at the end of this school year in very early June. I know that with your help, we can accomplish this.

I am confident that we can achieve our goal because, as the result of your unbelievable generosity, we have already built (during the Great Recession, no less) a stunning new church with a fabulous custom-made organ and gorgeous stained glass windows. (This is an interesting parallel with I.C. who built their church during the Depression.) We have as well created an Activities Center which is multi-purpose and which has provided already close to a decade of opportunities for our kids just as the new I.C. gym did for our generation when I was a boy. Thanks to dedicated members of the Parish Athletic Association, we also have new first class athletic fields. And there is now ample parking and great landscaping that has made this a place of beauty. More important than all the construction and changes in the look of the campus are the miraculous