

Creating a Strong Stewardship Parish: Prayer

For the last couple weeks in the bulletin and last week from the pulpit, I wrote and preached about our looking at our parishes and looking to the future. Who will we be in 3-5 years? Will we expand or contract? Will we be in a status quo or will we be breaking ground into new areas of ministry? How we be living the Great Commission of Jesus Christ? How will we be seen by those who are searching for a spiritual home? How will we be seen by the needy, broken, abandoned, and lost in our community? In the homily last week, I remarked how Bishop McKnight wants each of his parishes to be centers of charity and evangelization. While this call might seem new, it is actually a renewal of the call of the Gospels themselves.

How we execute this largely depends on us. Pastors come and go. Hopefully their influences are positive and help facilitate the kind of growth and identity Bishop McKnight is looking for. Bishop McKnight also likes to use the tagline, "Better Together." It comes from his deep set belief that the more we act as one, aimed at the common goal of proclamation of the Gospel, and with each person finding a way to participate in the overall goal, we will together be the apex of charity and evangelization in our communities.

In writing to SS. Peter and Paul and St. Joseph, I want you to understand that there are some things I will be talking about that can be done independently within each parish and there are some things that we will have to unite our forces on. There may be times that such cooperation will be on a deanery or diocesan level. Over the course of the next four weeks, the pastor's pens will focus on the four elements of stewardship and how we hope to bolster our efforts based on the good we are already doing.

The First Pillar: Prayer

The Catholic Church is first and foremost a familial relationship. We come together in prayer during the celebration of our sacraments. We gather for the worship of God at Mass. We understand that all our efforts, as well intentioned as they might be, will fall short without the grace of God. We need sacramental grace to achieve the ends to which Christ commissions us.

However, we need that day-to-day contact with God and each other as well. For many, this aspect of prayer is either seen as entirely private or as awkward. There is nothing new in this. Even Jesus' disciples asked Him how to pray.

Prayer has three levels: personal, family, and parish. Within that prayer, on all levels, should be components of the four types of prayer: adoration, penitential, petition, and thanksgiving. These are all aspects of healthy relationships.

Let's start with personal. Each Catholic should have a personal prayer life. It should be daily. Why? Because in doing so we keep a focus of the transcendent God and seek to deepen that relationship within our lives. This prayer can take many forms: the Divine Office, Rosary and other devotions, and just speaking to the Lord. It can be done at any time of the day. It can be in five minute snippets or hour long times. It can be done in your chair, on your knees, as you are driving in your car, and so on. Make no mistake though, it needs to be done. Your personal prayer and devotion to it will spill into the other levels of prayer.

Prayer must be happening in the family. Furthermore, dads, it is your responsibility from God to be the leader of prayer in your family! Your wife has a role as well. She shouldn't have to do both. Dads, if you don't have a personal prayer life, you will find leading your wife and children in prayer will seem awkward and clumsy. Some prayers are easier than others. For example: the prayers before and after meals are easy to make habitual. Dad leading a family rosary is doable. Bishop McKnight desires every home have an enthronement to the Sacred Heart. I will be happy to assist in doing these. The health of prayer in our families will have a great consequence in our parish.

On the parish level, prayer is first expressed in the Mass. The Mass is a source and summit of the Catholic life. That said, prayer should not be regulated to just Mass. For centuries, until the last several decades, parishes had flourishing devotional lives. The rosary was regular, gatherings for novenas, the Divine Office, Eucharistic Adoration, processions, and other devotions were alive and well. To be sure, secular life has so encroached on the hours of our days, even Sundays, that there seems to be no time for such a devotional life.

On the parish level I am proposing two things for us to look into: Within the mass itself, increasing the understanding that we come first and foremost to encounter our transcendent God. This is reflected in every aspect of Mass: from preaching to music to décor to any other aspect. Second, let us find ways to bring back a strong devotional life. Let it start in our homes and be reinforced in our parishes. I will ask our liturgy and worship committees and parish councils to work on this quickly. Prayer is the foundation and seedbed from which the other aspects of stewardship arise.

I will also be looking for materials to help us, especially the dads, to dig deeper into this role. I remind you all that we do have access to FORMED.org. I remind the men of SS. Peter and Paul that we do have men's groups developing around the program Kapaun's Men (on FORMED) and perhaps we can expand that into St. Joseph and deepen it at SS. Peter and Paul. It has been brought up that family Eucharistic Adoration could be set up. It has been brought up that we could have more people be a part of the essential ministry that is the Legion of Mary. Perhaps this is a place where both parishes could act in unison.

What I ask of you and your family is for you to find ways to deepen prayer in your own families, find ways to greater participate to in our parish prayer, and help us help you by giving us suggestions and asking for materials. What we hope to accomplish in the next year all hinges on this pillar. Our parishes are here to help.