



ST. ANTHONY CHURCH

PARISH OFFICE + 114 SUNSET DRIVE
HEREFORD, TEXAS 79045

PH. 806-364-6150 FAX 806-364-0969

WWW.STANTHONYSCATHOLICPARISH.COM

March 17, 2019
The Second Sunday of Lent

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

For the close the Year of Mercy in 2016, Bishop Zurek wrote a pastoral letter on the Ordained Priesthood. He gathered and reflected on many of the themes of Kingdom Priesthood that all the baptized share. He writes, "Through [the priest's] ministry the merciful God provides the spiritual food and drink that sustains and nourishes their entire being and continues to strengthen the divine life that Christ shared with them through Baptism." He then goes through each Sacrament that is administered through the ministry of the Priest. He ends with this statement, "As teacher, as presider, and as shepherd the priest manifests the mantra of psalm 136:1 *"For God's great merciful love is without end."* The priest is the sacramental instrument of Christ's mercy and love."

As I have read and prayed with this letter I have been convicted again and again to one simple fact, the community of the baptized both Kingdom Priesthood and Ministerial Priesthood must be lived in mission reaching outside of the Church walls. When the community of the faithful gathers in prayer it is to strengthen and call the Church of God into mission for the sake of those assembled, those not yet present, and those no longer present. In other words the community of baptized do not gather in order to complete a spiritual obligation, but to become more fully Mystical Body of Christ to bring the Word of salvation to the entire world. The Church gathers in order to be instructed, strengthened, and sent into the world to bear great spiritual fruit.

Over the last 30 years almost all of our parish communities in the Diocese of Amarillo have declined in number. We can attribute this to many factors. One of these factors is the lack of parish activities done together. It was not that long ago that each parish had baseball teams and volleyball teams. Most parishes had reasons to come together for meal and fellowship on a regular basis. Parish activities, councils, and boards were a much more central part of the social life of the Catholic Christian. Many of these things have gone by the wayside. As the social interaction, support, and prayerful fellowship decline, so does the commitment to the parish community, and we quickly begin to see the parish church as a place to fulfill an obligation rather than a central source of life and support for our homes and our community.

Recently, the health of priests has become a major concern for the Priest's councils and the Bishop. Many of our priests have shared their health concerns publically, especially those dealing with cancer. Others have had to seek treatment in much more private ways dealing with burnout and even clinical depression. In trying to identify ways to help priests be healthier, free to say yes to the needs and cares of the local parish, and support each other in more concrete ways several recommendations have been made. One of these suggestions is to begin looking at Mass Schedules across the Diocese. Bishop Zurek, with a unanimous Presbyteral Council, has asked each Parish to look at Mass Schedules, and to consolidate or cancel Weekend Masses that are less than half full.

It will take time for our parishes to reflect, poll, and prayerfully consider how these decisions can best be accomplished. Last Spring, St. Anthony's did an in-pew-survey that asked many of these questions. The Parish Council has decided to keep the Saturday evening Mass at 6:00pm and to consolidate the Sunday Morning Mass. We are asking the parish to vote on a Mass time of either 9:30am or 10am. Next Sunday, March 24, an online poll will be sent to all people registered on Flocknote asking this question. If you do not use Flocknote, you can call the Church office, give your name and your preference beginning March 25. The new Mass time will go into effect the Sunday after Easter, April 28. Any adult registered member of St. Anthony's can vote.

In this letter, I have laid out a lot of information and would like to draw it all together in a couple of final thoughts. When the Church gathers she becomes more fully the Sacrament of Salvation she is called to be. We gather not for the sake of those who come together at a specific time on a specific day, but we gather as Eucharistic Community for the salvation of the World. In the third Eucharistic Prayer we pray in these words, "May this Sacrifice of our reconciliation, we pray, O Lord, advance the peace and salvation of all the world." I know that change is never easy, can cause hurt, but can also light a new way to Jesus Christ. As much as this entire discussion began as a way to address the long term health concerns of the Priests of the Diocese of Amarillo, it has become a discussion of gathering parishes together as faith community for the sake of our Christian Mission. This diocesan wide consolidation has the great potential to bring our Catholic Parish Communities closer together with common goals, strengthened in Mission, carrying the Word of God to a world that desperately need the Mercy and Love we receive from Him.

In Christ I remain,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Anthony Neusch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "A" and "N".

Fr. Anthony Neusch
Pastor