

A WORD FROM FR. LEWIS...

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Joyful greetings in Christ!

When once pressed to stay in a village, Jesus says to His disciples that He is called to share the Good News in other places, “because for this purpose I have been sent” (Luke 4:43). Having spent my six years of Priesthood in my native Wilmington of New Castle County in Delaware, I am humbled that Our Savior has sent me with purpose to Ridgely and Denton and called me to share the joy of the Gospel in a place that is new for me and at the same time a place that is, praise God, now home.

I feel greatly blessed by God to be called to serve at St. Benedict-St. Elizabeth of Hungary as your priest and as one whose priestly heart is filled with gratitude and joy, for Jesus says to His disciples, “I have come that My joy might be in you, and your joy might be complete.” (John 15:11). Together, we are called to be the face of Christ Jesus to one another and to the community of Ridgely and Denton that we might know the joy of our Lord so our joy might be complete.

Perhaps it might seem strange to talk of joy at a time of transition as we say with heartfelt gratitude (and perhaps with broken hearts) a “Farewell and all best” to Fr. Gabage, a beloved pastor who has led the Church in Ridgely and Denton with great conviction, selflessness, vision and, above all, love, for the past five years. And yet, we remember that it is precisely joy that Jesus Himself talks about at the Last Supper (John 15:11, see above) as He prepares to be crucified and taken up in Jerusalem, the holiest city where, as we hear in today’s Gospel, Jesus is determined to journey. I am grateful to Fr. Gabage, a good friend, a holy priest and my co-collaborator in bringing the painting Our Lady of Wilmington to the Diocese for its Sesquicentennial, for his example of priestly service to you, as I am thankful to the other recent giants of St. Benedict-St. Elizabeth of Hungary on whose shoulders I now stand: Fr. Hilary, Fr. Carroll, Monsignor Kelley, and Fr. Coine, all of whom have helped form in me a priestly and apostolic heart.

Our former pastors were very supportive as I entered seminary formation after teaching French for 14 years at a public high school in Southern New Jersey. Because of my time working “in the real world,” I know the anxiety of having to pay the bills; I know what it feels like to scrimp and save to make sure the mortgage gets paid every month; and I know what it means to sacrifice to make ends meet. Whatever it is you may have suffered in life, I likely have suffered it, too.

Also, I have a tight-knit family whose love and support have helped strengthen me in my priestly ministry and whose own example of selfless service and love have inspired me in how I serve as a priest. My parents have been married for 55 years and my brother and sister-in-law for thirteen. My niece makes our family complete. I know how our parish cherishes their

families; this we have in common. I feel my life before the Priesthood has prepared me to serve you, my parish family, with great love and immense joy.

Our liturgical celebrations this weekend are all about love and joy. On Friday, the Church celebrated the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and Saturday, the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, pillars of the Church. We are all called to love with the Heart of Jesus, and as His faithful disciples, you and I are called to be pillars of the Church. We are all called to be holy in the ordinary moments of our everyday life; we are, after all, Saints-in-the-making.

Therefore, as I begin the joyful ministry of sharing the Good News with you and of making sure that everything we do in our parish leads us to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, please allow me to share with you how I hope to be your holy servant and, with you, a pillar of St. Benedict-St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish, by embracing the following Scripture quotes from John's Gospel:

* In gratitude to the Father for His disciples, Jesus prays "I thank You, Father, for they are Your gift to me." This is how I feel here at our parish, as I thank God the Father, for you are His gift to me, a gift I have long looked forward to and have already begun to treasure.

* John describes Jesus' love with these words, "He loved them to the end." As your priest, my hopeful and earnest endeavor is to love you as Jesus Himself loves: with my whole heart to the end.

* And finally, in speaking about Jesus the Lamb of God, John the Baptist models so humbly our necessary response with the words I adopted on the day of my Ordination to the Priesthood as a personal motto six years ago: "He must increase; I must decrease."

Together, then, let us share the joy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that, as one, we might make Him visible to one another and to our community in order that, as we hear in Psalm 16 from today's liturgy, we might delight in the fullness of joys in the Presence of God.

Saints-in-the-making, know that I have been praying for you long before I even knew I would serve as your priest. You are an answer to my prayers. Let us pray for one another that the joy of our Lord might be in us and our joy might be complete. May God bless you all abundantly.

Joyfully in Christ,

Fr. Lewis