

## **A Letter from Our Pastoral Coordinator September 23, 2018**



May Christ's peace, joy and hope be with you all!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ –

Last week, I wrote a brief commentary on the first of the 4 marks of the Church, that of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic nature of the Church. After affirming that it is one in her unity along with her diversity, we proclaim that the Church is *holy*. Today, we might hardly see how the Church is actually holy anymore as we face our current leadership and abuse crisis.

Today, as I write, is the Feast of the Exultation of the Cross. It is one of my favorite feasts as the cross and its symbolism has been such an operative and life-giving reality for me. This feast day's 2<sup>nd</sup> reading comes from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians. In chapter two, Paul writes that Jesus "emptied himself" and "humbled himself." Why? Simply put, Jesus gave himself up for us, for our salvation, i.e. our healing and restoration. We sinners, undeserving of God's loyalty and love, are yet loved incredibly by God. John 3:17 (from the Gospel of the Feast) reminds us that Jesus didn't come to condemn the world but to save (heal and restore) the world.

We are not holy but Jesus is. He is the one that sanctifies and makes holy the Church. The people who make up the Body of Christ are imperfect, flawed, sinners, right? The baptized, the members of the Body of Christ, have been infused with the power of God's grace. Jesus, the Holy one, calls us to share in His holiness in the work of the Church in the world! Despite our sinfulness, we are called to pursue sanctification, i.e. we must learn to cooperate with God and the power of His love.

This is indeed a mystery. The Church, though subject to sin is an agent of God's grace. Many outside and even inside the Church see her as only an institution. But the Church is far more than that. The Good News is that Jesus has become so incarnate in us and with us that he never abandons us even in our weaknesses and sin. Jesus is always present and "where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more" (Romans 5:20). All the more reason for us to have hope in the Church, the Body of Christ on earth. In this verse, Paul proclaims that grace is always triumphant over sin.

The Church isn't holy because we're so filled with sanctity. The Church is holy because God is at work in our midst, despite our sin. This mystery is at the core of our ecclesiology: that we can see who and what we are called to be in looking at Jesus, to being with Jesus, to hearing His Word, to receiving Jesus in the Eucharist. Then we are to become the very person that we receive and through all of us we bring Jesus into the world! That otherness, that specialness, that holiness is to love unconditionally as God has loved us, to be merciful as God is merciful, to help and assist others through that love which centers on Jesus Risen through the cross.

Just as our bodies need nourishment to keep them alive, so we must allow Jesus to feed us. It is His presence, His Spirit that guides us and gives us the strength to love Him, our neighbors, and ourselves despite our failures. That's the job of the Church: to heal and restore always and everywhere as Jesus heals and restores us!

In God's great love, hope and mercy,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deacon Jim".

Deacon Jim Fish, Pastoral Coordinator  
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