

May 27, 2018

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Over the past year, I spent a lot of time thinking, praying, and talking about our parish. I would like to share with you some fruits of these conversations.

1. Our Mission

Instead of writing a complicated mission statement, let's instead engage in a little thought exercise. Imagine that a student from China, a visiting parent from Iowa, or a guest lecturer from New York City has just come to the University of Utah and hears about the Newman Center. Maybe she is a Catholic doubting her faith, maybe he is a Catholic school graduate looking for something more real in his faith, or maybe she is a non-Christian who has never seen the inside of a Catholic Church. What should they see and hear in our church? What should be the conversations they are invited to? What would inspire them to deepen their life of faith? What could they receive here that would sustain their faith for the rest of their lives?

When I try to answer these questions, three images come to mind: cathedral, think tank, and coffee shop. These three words are just symbols that may help us triangulate our place in the life of the Church.

To me, the word **cathedral** is associated with prayer, unity of faith, and beautiful music and artwork. A cathedral's very existence speaks about God, and every detail preaches about His love. When I hear the word **think tank**, I see a place of study and debate. A think tank seeks Truth, no matter how challenging it might be. In my life, **coffee shops** are places where I exchange ideas and rub shoulders with friends and strangers alike. Politics matter less than friendships.

I think these three images speak directly to the expectations of what a modern university parish should be. They speak to our life of faith, our life of intellect, and the life of our community. With them in mind, we can better testify about Christ to the modern world.

2. Our Identity

Let us start with our patron saint. Who was she? Caterina di Giacomo di Benincasa was born in 1347 in Black Death-ravaged Siena, Italy. She was the 24th of 25 children born to a wealthy wool dyer and his wife. Catherine began having profound mystical experiences at the age of six, which encouraged her in a life of virtue and extreme penance. She became a Dominican Tertiary at the age of 16 while continuing to live in her parents' home. She had regular mystical visits from, and conversations with, Jesus, Mary, God the Father, and many of the saints. Catherine had no formal education and was illiterate, yet her theological knowledge acquired through prayer astounded learned theologians. She was especially devoted to working for the unity and spiritual health of the Church. Among her most famous accomplishments was that she persuaded the Pope to return to Rome from Avignon

in 1377. She was an important political figure in her day, often entering into negotiations between warring rulers through personal visits and dictated letters, including two men who both claimed to be the rightful pope during the Great Western Schism. Her practical wisdom and profound spiritual insight was widely sought both inside and outside the Church. She died in Rome at the age of 33, offering her life to God for the sanctification of the Church, and was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church in 1970.

Fifty-three years ago, the Second Vatican Council convened to renew the life of the Church in a modern era. Centuries of wars, a secular re-definition of the human person, and failed social and religious reforms left the people of the world in a state of loneliness, confusion, and disillusionment. Pope John XXIII, who called for the Vatican Council, said: “What is needed at the present time is a new enthusiasm, a new joy and serenity of mind in the unreserved acceptance by all of the entire Christian faith, without forfeiting that accuracy and precision in its presentation.” True renewal is a re-envisioning of the way we live our faith in our contemporary era, without any compromise of its truths and established doctrines.

Vatican II is over, but the job is not yet done. In the 50 years since Vatican II, we’ve seen some Catholics ridicule the changes in liturgical practice, calling it watering down the faith, with a misguided belief that the Church is a fossilized set of traditions rather than a living bride of Christ. As the same time, we’ve seen other Catholics create easily relatable yet doctrine-free moral communities, with a misguided belief that there was a “bad” Catholic Church before Vatican II and a “good” one after. I think in our divided society, we must resist the temptation to align ourselves with political labels like “liberal” or “conservative,” as if our faith is an extension of politics. Our universal Catholic Church is so much more.

Saint Catherine can help us to define our identity. She desired a life in solitude devoted entirely to God, but humbly accepted from Christ the mission to work in the world. In her writing, she describes Christ as the “bridge” between our souls and God. St. Catherine lived as a bridge between God and man, between people of differing opinions.

3. Our Future

Let us also look at our patron saint as a guide to our future. She can show us how to focus completely on Christ while still being a vital part of contemporary life. She ties us to our foundations, to the Dominican order, and to each other.

Let’s invite St. Catherine more deeply into our parish. Let’s look at Christ through her eyes.

At the age of 27, already renowned for her charity and blessedness, St. Catherine visited the town of Pisa. While praying in front of the crucifix in the little church of St. Christina, she was struck by five blood-red rays that pierced her hands, feet, and heart, causing so much pain that she swooned. The stigmata she received at the foot of this cross were only visible to her until her death, when they became visible

to all. This cross was transported to her hometown of Siena after her death, where it remains to this day.

I think this image of the cross should hang above our altar. What a powerful way to be shaped by the spirituality of our patron saint! This cross can help us renew ourselves and forge a very contemporary Catholic identity within a tradition that upholds undeniable truths. All who would enter our chapel could clearly see who we are and how St. Catherine of Siena can help guide their spiritual lives as well.

Many people have asked me why we don't have a cross in our church. This is a timely concern. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (no.308) states, "There is also to be a cross, with the figure of Christ crucified upon it, either on the altar or near it, where it is clearly visible to the assembled congregation." This regulation is repeated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and our diocesan guidelines. The theological reason for a crucifix is that Christ reigns from the cross; it is his complete sacrifice of himself to the Father that transforms our world. It is his body and blood – once sacrificed on the cross and now continuously on the altar – that we celebrate when we participate in the Eucharist. The bodily, crucified Christ has utmost importance in our Catholic faith.

By installing the cross of St. Catherine, we would be doing more than just getting in line with the requirements of the law of the Church. I am not aware of another church in the world that has a replica of this cross as their main cross at the altar. Our parish would be the recipient of an incredible work of religious art with both rich history and a new context in a new age.

I know that the risen Christ hanging in our chapel has been an uplifting sign of the resurrection for many years. I would like to honor the rich history of our parish and find a place for the risen Christ sculpture. I propose that we move the risen Christ to the wall in the gathering space where the altar used to reside before the expansion of the chapel. We could print a short history of the parish and sculpture to accompany it as it hangs in its original place.

Contemplating a new cross above the altar is a big change for any parish, ours included. I welcome your thoughts as we move towards this change – feel free to come talk with me any time: before or after mass, during the week, or whenever you see me. Our Parish Council has voted to support the installation of this particular cross, and they are also happy to talk with you about it. We are currently working with the diocesan arts and environment committee, following the standard project approval process.

I hope this time will become for us an opportunity to renew our relationship to Christ, the Church, and one another.

Blessings to you in Christ,

Jacek Buda, OP
Pastor, St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Newman Center

DRINKS & DISCUSSION

Join Fr. Jacek for a community night, to continue conversation about our parish mission, identity, and future.

Light refreshments.

**SATURDAY
JUNE 9
6 PM
CATE'S CAFE**



From chiesa di Santa Maria del Rosario in Prati, Roma