

051307 6th SUNDAY OF EASTER

Mother's Day blessings to each and every mother present here with us... Most of us never... ever get over the love of our mothers... though we may not express or demonstrate our affection in fully appropriate ways. I believe that like the seal of becoming a Christian – we are indelibly marked with the love of our mothers. Part of that seal includes us forever remembering the gems of wisdom that could only come from mothers.

For example, my mother taught me about ANTICIPATION... she would say to me: "Just wait until your father gets home." My Irish mother taught me about the meaning of CHALLENGE... She would say to me: "What were you thinking? Answer me when I talk to you! Don't talk back to me!" And mother taught me about humor – like when she said, "If you get your toes cut off by the lawn mower, don't come running to me." So thank you mothers – thank you moms everywhere – Jesus has set up a special room of rest and honor in heaven... and His Mother is there praying and interceding as well.

And just as a sidenote to these words about mothers, if some of you mothers are Internet savvy – there are wonderful web sites you may wish to take a look at. I know of many – a few that come to mind are www.Catholicmom.com, Catholicinasmalltown.com and Catholicfamily.com. Many of these kinds of websites also feature weekly Podcasts where you can listen to and share in their family life and the experiences of living the faith in a secular world.

Now, as I complete the first deacon assignment by the archbishop, I have a few overview reflections and sharing. Some of these points are challenges or problem oriented – and some are wonderful observations that give us hope. Let me start with some areas of struggle.

If we consider the first reading from ACTS today – we heard that some who came to do teaching (instruction) of the faithful came without mandate or authority – so we see that the problem of self-proclaimed leaders in the Church had a very early origin. In those early hours of Christianity, the apostles gave authority for teaching and correction. Given that authority, they clarified what the approved teaching of the Church was with regard to circumcision and complex rituals and purity laws.

Here in this day and age... here in this and other parishes, there are people who decide what they will teach or share and what they will practice as faith. They have done this with no authority other than what they think... or what they have come to believe from some reading or from the media or general practices of other churches.

The publication called Our Sunday Visitor had an editorial about this. They referred to this as a form of a 'church of little popes,' or a perceived infallibility from below. So an observation I share with you today is that authority comes from the Holy Spirit through the charism of leadership in the Church.

And, in the most serious of teaching matters (mortal sin, abortion, etc.) – the teaching of the leadership of the Church is wrapped in another gift called infallibility – real infallibility. A closing thought about this story from ACTS – what was it that happened when the non-authorized teachers came from Judea? They spread dissention, confusion and disagreement. As we heard in the first reading, the Church is one. From the second reading, John sees the Church is Apostolic – founded on the twelve Apostles of the Lamb. One thing is certain – St. Paul hated ‘factions’ and disharmony in the Church. So where we find this – it is likely a Church (it’s members actually) in need of correction or admonishment. This is particularly... particularly true when proclaimed believers draw positions against major areas of the Church such as abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research... for they set precedent of the value or use of one human life over another. I just read of the Holy Father’s travels to Latin America. Benedict, this Good Shepherd of love is most unequivocal when he strongly reiterates the Church’s position that politicians excommunicate themselves from the Eucharist when they take public positions in favor of issues such as abortion. Would that all clergy had the courage of such direct teaching and honesty.

There are many other observations that come from this assignment as deacon: baptism and marriage requested by non-practicing members of the Church... the erosion of families... increases in divorce, cohabitation and adultery...

Because of the damage to families and our societal construct, the Holy Father says that the Church (clergy and laity) ought to give priority attention to family issues... family support... family encouragement. So these are just a few of the areas that I see as problem-some in the Church today.

Now – there are many very hopeful signs: Nearly 500 men from Catholic dioceses across the country will be ordained for the priesthood this spring of 2007. They represent well-educated professionals, newcomers to the nation and souls touched by war. Some emigrated to the U. S. from countries as diverse as Poland, Vietnam and the Philippines. About six percent of the Class of 2007 are converts to Catholicism, and one convert was an Episcopalian priest for 12 years. Many have a broad range of educational backgrounds: educators, a professional pilot for 28 years, a financial type and yet another from law enforcement. There are physicians, lawyers, psychologists, architects, and the vice-president of an ad agency. Thank you Lord for the gift of priests – thank you for you who prayed for vocations.

And speaking of gifts – we are fed here by faithful shepherds... our Bishop Charles Chaput and our pastor Father Gregory. In no case... NO CASE need any worry about questionable theology or bad teaching. And by my own observations and so many comments from parishioners and visitors -- it is most always the case that holiness and joy permeate our liturgies in this lovely mountain church.

Think of that when you feel at peace during Mass here. This is a part of the peace that Christ promised to us... nourished by the Word – and fed with the Food of eternal life. Speaking of Sacraments – a seven-year old girl named Mary Reynolds said it best: “Happiness is receiving Jesus in the Eucharist. There are other things that make me happy,” said Mary. “But mostly, it’s receiving Jesus.” Seven years of age ... those are her words. I think this is why Jesus told us we must become like little children.

I also see signs of healing ... people... parishioners... friends... some of whom experienced the cancer of a loss of faith. Some have experienced the cancer of separation from the Sacraments... or a cancer of lifeless marriages... the cancer of addiction... some have said or demonstrated, “Deacon Tom... My cancer is in remission, thanks be to God.”

And we have some vibrant accomplishments in parish organizations – but not a single group ought to be satisfied with what they have done – but rather what they are yet called to do in the name of Christ – and service to His people.

Now, speaking of service – my wife and I came to this parish nine years ago. In our sometimes joyful... sometimes broken ways – we have tried to be of service and of-love. You have supported us as we went through four years of deacon seminary classes – and so many of you have sent cards and sent gifts and had Masses said for us.

In ways and in areas where I have had rough edges – most of you demonstrated tolerance and love and support and caring. A very few of you have taken exception to my ministry – and this has helped us to work on loving all the time – praying for persecutors no matter the circumstances. Many visitors have asked for copies of my homilies that I asked permission from the diocese to start a www.deacontomonline.com website – and I have posted many weekend Mass homilies and reflections on my website.

As I complete the end of my assignment here – I have asked the Archbishop for a leave of absence so that my wife and I can relocate to Arizona – moving closer to our oldest daughter and her family. While we are still in painful discussions about all of this – Archbishop Charles has given permission for this move to take place.

We thank all of you – parishioners... friends... good Catholics and marginal practice folks with good hearts yearning to find God. Thanks to couples I've married and children baptized. Thanks to non-Catholics and others of this community... Father and pastor: thank you for your prayers and for areas where you have allowed me to participate in the work of this Catholic faith Community. For my failures – I beg you a short memory. For successes – let us thank God. In all things – let us remember these Latin words: Deus Caritas Est.... God is Love.