

12/3/2005

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MJJ

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

As I write this letter to you, I am still feeling the intensity of our liturgical life together in this past week. In the midst of the powerful Advent season of expectation and waiting there were two very powerful funeral liturgies.

On Wednesday Vincent DeWindt was buried from Emmanuel Church of the Deaf. He, his wife and four children (all Deaf) were among the first people I met when I arrived in Rochester. In his final illness, his wife, Charleen, heroically lived out the wedding promise, "...in sickness and in health..." and each of the four children lived the command: "Honor thy father and thy mother." During a dialogue in the homily, the four grandchildren beautifully expressed the faith they received from their parents and grandparents when they assured us all that while they were sad that Grandfather was gone, he was now in heaven, with Jesus and without suffering. They were willing to let him go to God.

Joe Farrell's funeral was held on Thursday at St. Augustine Church. Here too, this funeral was a culmination of a process that was both challenging and inspiring. Again, it was the faithfulness and love radiating from Joe's family and friends in those days before he died that allowed his Dad, Ed, to finally say at Joe's deathbed, "I'm happy for him; sad for me and all of us, but happy for him: he's at peace now."

These funeral liturgies come to mind because in a real way we too are experiencing the mystery of death. All five of our parishes are losing our comfortable, familiar ways and the places of being Church. Let me share briefly what the past few days have said to me. It seems that there are three steps to the dying process.

- 1.) "Dying is a movement inward," one poet reminds us. At Emmanuel Church of the Deaf, it seemed that over the years Vincent slowly withdrew away from us all and into another, private inner world that none of us could enter. Joe's dying was not as long a process, but he too (uncharacteristically) asked several times to be left alone, to be by himself. We also must take the time, I believe, to do the internal work of letting go of what we've held so dear in the past. This inward movement into the core of our being may enable us to rediscover within our own hearts the One who can restore us to peace and serenity. This is the motto of St. Francis deSales: "Heart speaks to heart."
- 2.) For the Christian, the heart of the matter is our faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and death is our last Act of Faith. God was there before we came to be and the same God continues to be after we die. While we know almost nothing about life after death, we know by faith that our life (individually and collectively) does not end in nothingness.
- 3.) Finally, as we hear in the First Preface for funeral masses: "Lord, for your faithful servants, life is changed, not ended..." Here is the challenge. In all this pain of dying, we remain faithful servants—allowing the Christ-light we received at Baptism to guide us, allowing God the Potter to form us the clay.

2005/8/15

In the context of this reflection on death, I would like to share the following "news items."

- There is no further news to report about the sale of our campuses. Solid Purchase Offers are in place for the St. Augustine and Our Lady of Good Counsel campuses. We hope to move the Sts. Peter and Paul process along.
- St. Monica campus continues to be "fixed up" to receive and welcome the other communities.
- The attorneys have sent us all the forms required for amalgamating our parishes and I will be calling upon all the parish trustees to set up a meeting, hopefully by the beginning of next week.
- Deacon Bob Burke is coming on board nicely and is taking charge of preparations for the sacraments of Baptism and Marriage.
- The Advent Schedule is in place. Please make sure you have a copy so you know times and places for all the services. December 8 (Immaculate Conception) is a Holy Day and there are several wonderful services to choose from.
- There was some discussion about having the Christmas vigil mass at St. Augustine Church. The decision was made to merge the weekend and Holiday schedule and so the vigil mass on December 24 will be at St. Monica Church.
- Thanks to the very generous offer from Caci Salvaggio, the traditional Christmas pageant from St. Augustine parish will move to the vigil mass at St. Monica. If you haven't seen it, you are in for a treat.
- The Finance Committee of Sts. Peter and Paul met last week and the next meeting will be a combined meeting with all of our amalgamating parishes. Details to follow.
- Very soon, we will form an "Interim Council," to be in place by the beginning of the new year. This council will lay the foundation for a new (united) Pastoral Council.
- Also, very soon we will call together from among all our communities a Building Committee to begin to look at the renovations necessary to make St. Monica Church our new home.
- On a personal note, I was not able to be a part of the Christmas show that I have done every year and I miss that opportunity and pray for the Company of actors and musicians. May their ministry continue to be a blessing for all involved.

With love,

Fr. Ray 11/1

Fr. Raymond H. Fleming
December 3, 2005