

SOMETHING TO BE PROUD ABOUT

It is a great joy to walk with you in faith. This weekend we remember our heritage as a parish, we celebrate this present moment and we ask God to strengthen our belief in Him. As we assemble in different ways, some in vehicles for the transmitted Mass, some in church following the new protocols and some in the safety of their homes watching on YouTube, we are a blessed community. None of us would have thought that Holy Week and Easter would find us navigating our faith celebrations in unfamiliar territory. Yet we did and we thrived. No one would have thought our retreats for the Sacrament of Confirmation would be online and Zoom would describe a meeting place, rather than the speed of a race car. While technology has pushed us forth and challenged us, the core of our hunger to be community and live our faith has not wavered. For this I am grateful and thrilled.

One of the great places of resiliency in all of this has been our Reopening Team. We would not be open without them. The countless hours of interaction, the time of open dialogue to make things better and the call to serve our parish at the baseline of our COVID-19 experience is nothing less than miraculous. We are open because everyone did their part. We are open because we embraced with acceptance what the committee set forward as a plan. This task was daunting and with every decision there was a serious responsibility. Hours upon hours were spent discerning what would be the best practice and culminated in an excellent plan that we are following. I hear of what is taking place in other places, but we are not in other places; we are here. I hear how we could lift some of the restrictions, yet the heavy burden of the virus stays the same. I am very committed to this plan. Will it keep us safe? It will keep us as safe as possible given the rapid transmission of a disease that has gripped the global community.

I can attest we weighed a lot of options. I can attest we did a lot of praying. I can attest we are constantly monitoring our response. Never before in the history of the parish or diocese have we faced this kind of challenge. We walk by faith and this is what is leading us. None of this can happen if it was not for the faith filled parishioners all doing their part. Your acceptance of the plan and protocols make us a place where God can once again visit His people. Through your openness, our parish opens its doors each day. What a miraculous gift.

As we journey together may we learn from each other and always strive to help one another get closer to the Lord who never has and never will abandon us. Thank you to the Parish Staff and Reopening Team and team of volunteers who help us open our doors and hearts to God.



Father John

KNOWING THAT WE ARE LOVED

In the Gospel today, it tells us our vision is to be blessed because of what we see and our listening is to be blessed because of what we hear. So often times, with the luxury of having so many things to look at and so many things to listen to, we become selective in our hearing and in our watching.

As we come to the feast, we are invited to celebrate not only the Feast of St. Joachim and St. Anne, the parents of the most Blessed Mother, but we are also invited to define who we are as a parish. With everything going on in the world, our lives have changed. Some can see the silver lining in all of this; others can only see restrictions and a violation of their rights. The debate about science and religion continues, the debate between science and politics also has raised its voice. So how do we sift through it all?

In the first reading from Sirach we hear that the wisdom learned should be retold. In the letter of St. Paul the tapestry of love is reinforced. Paul tells us to be grounded in love. And the love that Christ has for us surpasses all knowledge and brings us to the fullness of God. That is where I long to start today.

In this place and in this time we are called as parish to become the embodiment of this love. Our whole being was created in love and longs for a defining love to break open our hearts. Paul describes the love of God for us going beyond the scope of measurement—depth, height, length and breadth cannot come close to measuring the love God has for us. If we just sit in that mystery, in that moment, in that place and try to absorb and comprehend God's love then who we are as a parish, who we are as a gathering of assembled believers becomes crystal clear. We are loved. Wherever we experience true love, real love, when our soul and entire being encounters love and we know we are loved in a special way, it commands us to a responsibility and it contains a power. Often times songs are written about the power of love. When we visit and unpack the mystery of being loved by God, we then carry a power and responsibility to share that love with the world without discrimination. What we receive we are to give.

At the heart of being and becoming the parish of St. Anne, at every moment in history we are to pause and sit in this mystery of the moment of being loved. If we can and when we do, we will know what we are called to do. I have been thrilled to be here over the past seven years to walk with you. Little did I realize we would walk through a time in history of a pandemic, where masks are mandatory and staying safe by being apart would help us become a better faith filled community. But here we are. What has not changed is that we are loved. And because we are loved by God we have a power and a responsibility. We ask St. Anne to help our hearts to cherish this love. She, with the help of St. Joachim, passed that onto the Blessed Mother, their daughter. She was so caught up in the power and potential of God's love that when an angel arrived she did not scream and run away but listened to the angel about God's plan. That deep love was taught to her through the example of loving parents. They were faith filled.

We are invited to get back to love. We are called to reexamine how we share love within the family and then within the parish family. With love there is an incredible responsibility. God gave us that because He first loved us. May we take this day to sit in the mystery of this moment when God fills us with love. When we truly feel it, when we truly believe it, then we are ready to begin a new chapter, a new beginning, a new way.

May the journey always lead us to cherish the love that God has for us.



Father John Ouper