

“Listen Graciously to the Prayers of this Family Whom You Have Summoned Before You”

As a priest, it is humbling each day to come together with the community and celebrate the gift of the Eucharist. In my lifetime just like for many, the translations of the prayers have evolved. When the new Roman Missal came out in the richness of its translation, we all found new depth in what was being presented before us. It is because of this that I would like to call our focus and attention to one of those revisions. In the third Eucharistic Prayer we find the words to be prayed *“Listen graciously to the prayers of this family whom you have summoned before you.”* It is the word “summoned” I want to draw to your attention. Being summoned is a call to mission. In the old translation, which was used for most of my priesthood, the same phrase was prayed in this way, *“Hear the prayers of the family you have gathered here before you.”* What has led me to deep prayer is the difference between what it means to be gathered and what it means to be summoned. The richness of the word “summoned” uncovers a deep sense of purpose that might get lost in using the word “gathered.” Summoned implies a deep intention. When I was young, I did not gather in the principal’s office, I was summoned there. There was a heightened sense of what would take place. The importance could not be denied. Gatherings can have many layers, but a fresh meditation on what it means to be summoned can become for us a vital part of how we move forward as a parish in the light of the COVID pandemic. Because we are summoned as a parish, we must do all that we can to overcome the obstacles that keep parishioners and families from answering that purpose-filled invitation. This will not be an easy task. But is precisely because we have been summoned that it is a pathway we must follow. What we are summoned to is very simple. This part of the Eucharistic Prayer is prayed following the institutional narrative of what took place at the Last Supper. In other words, the consecration. We are summoned to the Eucharistic presence of our Savior who is present on the altar when we pray these words. The Vatican II Council called the Eucharist the source and summit of our faith. We are summoned by the source and summit to bring Christ into the world.

Over the next months I invite you to ponder, reflect and meditate on God’s Holy Word and the Blessings of Sacramental Grace and what it means to be summoned by God. Think on what purpose it is the Holy Trinity is calling you forth. We are in uncharted territory, but the summoning has not changed. There is a deep purpose and conviction found within us when we find ourselves in that deep place. The God of creation, the Savior who walked on water and the fire of the Holy Spirit is bringing us together. Our moment is in the now. Our prayers must seek new ways to embrace what God is presenting before us. Soren Kierkegaard wrote *“Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards.”* As we live in these times, we might not have any answers or renowned wisdom, but what we do have is the call to be summoned here before God. We will make mistakes, we will have to try new ways, but we cannot be paralyzed while we wait for everything to pass. We will take some steps forward and we will take some steps backward, but if they are done in kindness and love we will be better because of our efforts. Being summoned is a heavy responsibility which will lead to great joy. If we do this well, if we work to find new ways to bring the family that is summoned to discover pathways to respond to the call, we will contribute in a small way to the building of God’s Kingdom.

I ask you to spend time in prayer and uncover that place where you are summoned. Reflect on it, search for it and allow it to embrace and excite you.

As the journey continues, may it find us in prayer for one another,



Father John

TRANSFORMING LOVE

This week I would like to focus on the second reading from the letter of St. Paul to the people of Rome. He tells those listening, "Do not conform yourselves to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind..." He goes on to state by discerning the will of God we will be led to what is good and pleasing and perfect. In these times, being transformed by renewal is such a contrast to the conforming of the things of this age going on. Being transformed is a necessary focus. When I read and reread these words, I was brought to a place of hope. Our spirit and our minds are not shackled to this age nor this pandemic. While we wait for science to give us a vaccine, and legislation to let us know what is allowable, we have our minds and our hearts. These do not have to conform, but we are to allow the transformation of the soul to continue and soar. I am not saying to lose the face mask and shield and throw caution to the wind, on the contrary, I am saying let us not lose heart, let the renewal of our soul be transformed by the realization that our hearts are still restless for the Lord and should be. The fire of the Holy Spirit is still presenting itself to us. The things of this age are weighing heavy on everyone. Even simple actions now take much more time now including the amount of sanitizing, the placing of face masks on and off, in the car, by the door. Our lives are changed, but all of these changes are external. What hasn't changed is how we renew ourselves with God.

The other day, when I was golfing at Fox Bend early in the morning, I was struck by the sunrise and how God throws light all over the surface of the earth. This hasn't stopped, pandemic or no pandemic. The beauty of all the shades of green that change as the sun mounts the sky is transforming and ever changing. It is why I love to get out early. I find it easy to be caught up in the wonder of God. I wrote on my score card that day something I want to go back to over and over: When we stop looking for brilliance, we will stop finding it. God is brilliant and wants us to be drawn into renewing ourselves in His transforming love. He wants us to move from the heaviness of the world where a pandemic has necessitated our classrooms, gyms and work spaces all relocate into the space of our homes to a mindfulness that leads to the eternity of our soul. It is powerful; it is magnificent. He hasn't stopped throwing His brilliance upon the world. He has not stopped forgiving our sins. He has not stopped coming to earth and offering us the Eucharist. He does this so we can leave the heaviness of the world and not conform ourselves to it. We've got this. We are stronger than the disease that threatens us because love conquers everything. Love does end in death, but it always leads us to the resurrection. That is at times bitter and hard, unexpected and tragic.

True transformation and renewal lead us to the heart and soul. The will of God will lead us to what is good, pleasing and perfect.



Father John Ouper