



Caritas in Parish Life

"The life of Jesus is a life for others. The life of Jesus is a life for others. It is a life of service." (Pope Francis, 7/28/13, World Youth Day)

24 November 2014

Every pastor loves to see his parishioners using their gifts fully...and together. This autumn, we've enjoyed plenty of expressions of that. The Hungarian community came together marvelously for the 110th anniversary of the founding of St. Ladislaus Parish; the Polish community likewise organized splendidly for the Pulaski Day events, and members of the territorial community have been criss-crossing town, forming single groups of liturgical ministers, and coordinating religious education.

This has all been a joy to witness, and I'm grateful to the Spirit of Christ and to everyone for the generous responses.

As we approach the end of this liturgical year, and, in the United States, as we also begin the so-called "giving season," it is a good time to reflect on a fundamental aspect of Christian life, one that has been remarkably heralded by Pope Francis, and one with its own strong resonance in our parish: the call to follow Jesus in his way of service and compassion for the poor.

The Gospel for this past Sunday, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, demonstrated the gravity of serving others: our salvation depends on it. The judgment scene described by Jesus in Matthew 25: 31-46 has the righteous (the sheep) receiving eternal reward for the way they responded to the hungry, thirsty, naked, stranger, ill and imprisoned, while the condemned (the goats) receive their punishment for their failure to respond.

Thankfully, many in Holy Family Parish serve the poor as if their salvation depends on it. I think of the wonderful work done on a daily basis by our parish Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. And, increasingly, we're not only delivering services, important as that may be, but we are really connecting with those we serve. We're engaging each other, accompanying and sharing faith as we do so. This is all the more impressive as just 11 months ago, we were still three separate parishes.

Matthew 25 can't be read too simplistically. In reality, we jump back and forth from sheep to goats, in accord with the sin and grace in our lives. While the criteria for the reign of God remains the same, our common circumstances are always changing, necessitating dynamic responses. For example, President Obama's Nov. 20 announcement of revisions in the country's immigration program will prompt us to assure that as many of our parishioners and residents can find a helpful path out of the shadows of undocumented life.

As if he was reading our parish landscape last year, Pope Francis said, "I can clearly see that what the Church needs today is the ability to heal wounds and warm the hearts of faithful, it needs to be by their side. I see the Church as a field hospital after a battle. It's pointless to ask a seriously injured patient whether his cholesterol or blood sugar levels are high! It's his wounds that need to be healed. The rest we can talk about later. Now we must think about treating those wounds. And we need to start from the bottom."

At Holy Family, over the last few months, we're moving to that new "field hospital" model of *caritas*. With the addition of Bridgette Perez as our parish director, we have placed an emphasis on healing as the foundation of both building community and breaking the cycle of poverty. Through the dedicated ministry of parish case manager Alexi Motta, the development of the Women's Justice Circles, and the continuing day-to-day

excellence of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, we have uncovered varied levels of pain at the individual, family and group levels.

We're working hard as a parish team, collaborating with partners both new and old, from anchor institutions such as Catholic Charities and St. Peter's University Hospital to start-up community organizations Faith in New Jersey and the Esperanza Project. We have high hopes for cultivating a "civilization of poverty," which, as the late Salvadoran Jesuit priest Ignacio Ellacuria described it, is "a universal state of affairs that guarantees the satisfaction of basic needs, the freedom to make personal choices, and a space for personal and communal creativity that shapes new forms of life and culture; these in turn engender new relationships with nature, with other human beings, within oneself, and with God."

Some of the things to watch for – and to participate in – over the coming months will be the ways we deepen our existing ministries in charity and justice. For an overview of those works, please go to this page on our parish website: <http://www.holyfamilyforall.org/charity-justice/>

A couple of evolving examples:

- 1) Seasonal "giveaway" events. Over the recent years the parish has been a grateful beneficiary of numerous toy, food and clothing drives initiated by our partners, most notably St. James Parish in Basking Ridge. How can we make these moments more meaningful for everyone, even an "encounter," as Pope Francis likes to say, where our Catholic identity is explicit? How can we reduce – or eliminate – the gap between donor and recipient? How can everyone feel they are part of a running narrative?

A clue to how we might answer these questions is the way we have replaced the Halloween "Trunk or Treat" giveaway with expanding "Healthy Saints" event in October, that combines free (healthful) food, faith sharing, community presentations and a family environment.

- 2) Development of a parish "business," where, together with Catholic Charities, we hope to invite youth and adults from across the diocese into a structured immersion experience, for a day, or a set of days, for faith enrichment and works of mercy. Much more to come on this in weeks to come.

So stay tuned. And, even in the midst of Christmas shopping, remember you can act justly, too. Go to crsfairtrade.org or serrv.org to learn more about fair trade consuming, or even use our Christmas giving trees, adapted this year, to provide gifts in the name of those on your shopping list. Our Christmas giving trees will have opportunities for you to directly help families here and abroad.

Advent blessings,



Msgr. Joseph Kerrigan, Pastor

"Accompanying on its own is not enough. It is not enough to offer someone a sandwich unless it is accompanied by the possibility of learning how to stand on one's own two feet. Charity that leaves the poor person as he is, is not sufficient. True mercy, the mercy God gives to us and teaches us, demands justice, it demands that the poor find the way to be poor no longer." (Pope Francis, Sept. 10, 2013)