

Fourth Sunday of Easter
Homily ~ May 15, 2011

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St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

Once upon a time there was a great famine upon the land. Three soldiers, hungry and weary of battle, came upon a small and impoverished village. The villagers, suffering a meager harvest and fatigued from many years of war, saw the three soldiers come upon them. Quickly they hid from sight what little they had to eat.

They met up with the three at the village square. “There’s not a bit to eat in the whole province,” they told the soldiers. “You’d better just keep moving on to the next village.”

“Oh, but we have everything we need,” one soldier said. “In fact, we were thinking of making some stone soup to share with all of you. You look hungry. Wouldn’t you like some?”

“Stone soup! What a ridiculous thing!” the villagers exclaimed. “You can’t make soup from a stone.”

But the three soldiers reached into their pockets and each took out a smooth, round stone. “We have brought with us some wonderful stones that should make for a great and hearty soup. Do you have a large cauldron we might borrow to make our stone soup?”

The local innkeeper pulled a large cauldron from the kitchen of his inn and placed it in the center of the village square. The three soldiers filled it with water and built a strong roaring fire under it. Then with great ceremony the three soldiers took the three stones and placed them into the water one at a time. They waited for their stone soup to come to a boil.

“Do you know what would really help this soup?” asked one of the soldiers, “a hefty dash of salt and pepper. You can’t have a good stone soup without salt and pepper.”

Timidly, one of the villagers said, “Well, I think I might be able to find some salt and pepper if I can share your stone soup.”

The soldiers quickly nodded and assured the village that there would be plenty of stone soup to go around.

After tasting the boiling broth, one of the soldiers said, “I do like tasty stone soup. Of course stone soup with cabbage is hard to beat.”

After a few moments, a villager approached holding a cabbage he retrieved from its hiding place and added it to the pot. Another villager remembered she had some carrots. She added them to the boiling pot. As the kettle boiled on, the memory of the village improved. In short time, barley, parsley, salted beef and rich cream had found their way into the great pot. And lo and behold, together with the three soldiers, the whole village sat down to a great feast. The best stone soup ever.

Just as it takes many and all to make a great feast, it takes many and all to make a great parish. At this time, as we mark the 140th anniversary of parish life, there are 3,001 households with 7,809 persons from 60 zip codes that make us who we are.

Like the villagers who brought their ingredient one by one and added it to the boiling cauldron, I am inviting each of you—young, old and in-between—to bring what you have to the recipe to make our own cauldron of stone soup. What can I bring? Perhaps it is the gift of prayer. More than ever we need to strengthen the bonds of this household of faith with prayer. In these challenging and contradictory times, we need prayer to discern God’s will for us, to focus on what it is we are to do with the gifts he has entrusted to us, and how we can be a people pleasing to him, not just in word but in deed 24/7.

I invite you to pray for us and with us. I invite you to lift up in prayer the needs of our parish, of the larger church of which we are a part. I invite you to pray with us for our family life that is certainly facing many challenging times; and beyond our family, the family of our community where we work or go to school or where we live. And even more importantly, our world. Even though we are soon to be 7 billion people in this world, the world is getting smaller and smaller and we need one another.

It may be the gift of personal prayer, private prayer, or prayer here with the community—daily Mass, weekly Mass, daily rosary, Eucharistic adoration, or intercessory prayer, or being part of the prayer line, or calling in your requests. It was truly amazing this past Lent how 696 of you clocked 34,958 miles on our

Walk to Jerusalem by doing just this. That was only six week's work. What if we expanded it to 52 weeks of the year? What power there is when people walk with the Lord and with one another.

On a personal note, I thank you for your prayerful support. Our ministry would not be as effective and vibrant if it weren't for you and the prayers that lift up our hands and help us to tackle one day at a time.

In addition to taking time to commit to prayer, I ask you to pledge your time and your talent. We need your energy. We need your enthusiasm. We need your presence. At present, we have over 90 ministries that make our parish what it is...trying to day by day to spell out the work of Jesus here on our campus and wherever we feel God is calling us.

These ministries cover the whole spectrum of life in a family—from committee work to working behind the scenes; from teaming up with our children and youth to visiting the sick with Communion at home or in nursing homes; from answering the phone at the welcome desk of the Family Center to going to the soup kitchen; from greeting or ushering or serving or working on funeral dinners or on Andy's Attic, or on weekly projects or annual events. We welcome your insights. We welcome your energy. We need to have the second and third generations join us as we continue what was handed on to us by those who built this church. Isn't it amazing that in 1871 only twelve Catholics gathered at Richfield Township and started St John's story. And here we are. The torch has been passed on to us. How can we keep it burning bright and keep it from going out?

I am grateful for the corps of dedicated persons and our staff members who along with so many give 110% of their time to accomplish our mission.

I ask each of you to fill out one of the stewardship commitment cards indicating which ministry you wish to join or which you wish to continue to serve in. These cards can be placed in the barrels at the doors of the church.

Now that the debt on our family center is paid, where do we go from here?

- As our buildings age and are used seven days a week, naturally some capital expenditures are needed.

- We need to develop our parish cemetery on the corner of Oak and Richfield Roads. Very soon we will be opening a new section for earth burials and placement of cremated remains. This goes along with continuing to work to pay off the debt incurred from building the chapel and mausoleum.
- We are also in the process of twining with Blessed Sacrament Parish. As of March we have a new area to focus on. The people of Blessed Sacrament have a strong record of being engaged. They have 80 acres. We need to look at ways where we can share programs, to twin our programs, and to make both campuses vibrant and vital.

There is much more to do, though. It is not about building, it's about people. And the challenge is how we can engage more people to be part of this Catholic story that is really very relevant, very filled with blessings, and so many demands and opportunities to become a part of. So I'm hoping we can continue to reach out and to call back those who walked away by inactivity or by lapse of faith and become the family God has called us to be from day one.

So at a world that is ever shouting at us to do more, to be more, to get more, how does God want us to serve? How will we know the right place, the right time, the right gift to share? Well at this moment, the best any of us can do is this: say, Lord, here I am. I am willing. I will try. The rest is up to you.

And so may God's spirit inspire us, guide us, and direct us. May God take us to that place where deep gladness and the world's deepest needs collide. And may we be a fitting part of your plan, O Lord, for your purpose for our lives in every way. May God bless us all in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

≈140th Jubilee ≈

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