

HOMILY

The Second Sunday of Easter

April 19, 2009

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St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

There once was a pastor who visited a certain man to urge him to come to church. They were standing and talking in front of a fireplace when the man said, "I do have faith and I do believe in God, but I don't think I need the church."

Without saying a word, the pastor reached into the fireplace with a poker iron and pushed one ember off to the side. The two of them stood there for several minutes and watched the ember in silence. It burned brightly for a while but then it began to fade. It grew dimmer until finally it went out. The solitary ember was gone, but the fire kept on burning.

Suddenly, the man understood the pastor's point. The religion of "God and Me" is not enough. Real Christianity remains what it has always been: A religion of "God and *We*." We are not meant to be in society as "a thousand points of light," each of us separate by ourselves, flickering precariously in the night. A thousand points of light can easily be blown out by a hard, strong wind.

No, we are meant to be a giant flame together, a light which the darkness can never overcome. We are meant to be together in Christ, a flame of faith, hope and love which is large enough to make the whole world bright.

Our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles is one of my favorites. It says: *The community of believers was of one heart and mind. They were not so much an organization but an organism in which all of their hearts beat as one with the heartbeat of God, who is love.* Can that be said of us? Can that be said of our parish? Are we that organism in which all our hearts beat as one with the heartbeat of God? Something to think about, pray about, talk about with one another.

Since I am privileged to be with you at all the Masses this weekend, I want to take this opportunity to visit with you about some happenings on campus. The economic downturn, which started almost 90 weeks ago has affected many of our households—so much has been in a state of flux from the declining market conditions, job security, global problems, to the reduction or loss of health benefits and pensions. Day after day, week after week, we continue to lift up these heavy burdens to the Lord. Remember, God didn't promise to spare us from storms of any sort, but that he is with us in all storms.

Because donations to Christian Service and Outreach East have been steady, we've been able to serve three times as many with assistance in food, clothing, medical and utilities and some rent. Our newly remodeled HUP Access Center continues to help persons to go online in search of gainful employment.

Three timely seminars—Budgeting, Coping Mechanisms for the Unemployed, and Available Genesee Health Plans—will be offered in coming weeks. This July, I am excited that our campus will house over three hundred Catholic youth from three states for a week-long Catholic Heart work camp that will have outreach projects to repair homes and supply person-power to service programs in Genesee County like the Food Bank and the North End Soup Kitchen.

Like many households, we, too, have been affected financially by the sagging economy. Some have not been able to give as much as they were accustomed to in the past. Some of you have even increased your offering because you are in a position to do so. All in all, our Sunday offertory and income from fees and rentals are down about 7% from a year ago.

With an eye on keeping expenses in check, we're striving to be as proactive as we can to maintain quality programs and services to our households. With results finally in from the Mass survey this past December, we will once again have a summer Mass schedule. In order to have more times available for families with children, in June July and August we will once again have a 6:30 PM Mass on Sundays. However, during these three months, we will **not** have an 8 AM Mass. Blessed Sacrament has an 8:30 AM which Father George or I will say from time to time. We encourage you to come to one of the five Masses on campus either earlier or later. But if you do choose to go to Blessed Sacrament, your envelope will return here.

One twist of events in the down economy, with the decrease in the home market, with money we've had saved for property acquisition, we were able to purchase the pink house and property north of the church on 508 North Dayton Street at a very fair and good price. And later this spring, we hope to take down the house and, for the time being, make that into green space for parish use. The house was purchased from restricted funds that we have kept aside for our long-range plans.

This week you will receive a letter from me regarding the upcoming Diocesan Services Appeal, reminding ourselves that we are part of the larger Church. Remember, the early community of believers was of one heart and mind; no one claimed that any of his possessions were. There was no needy person among them.

