

HOMILY

The Fifteenth Annual Polka Mass

Saturday, November 7, 2008

4:30 P.M.

The Thirty-second Sunday of Ordinary Time

Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski

St. John the Evangelist Parish

Davison, Michigan

*Niech będzie pochwalony Jesus Chrystus,
y na wieki wiekow. Amen*

*Praised be Jesus Christ,
both now and forever. Amen*

It gives me great joy to welcome each and every one of you to our Annual Polka Mass. It's hard to believe that this is our fifteenth annual gathering. When we celebrated our first Polka Mass in 1994, our new parish church was only one year old. We were joined by a busload of people from St. Mary's Parish in Parisville, the oldest Polish parish in the U.S.

Tonight our own Father George is with us—known tonight as *Father George-ski*. Also back at his post at the altar is our seminarian Andrzej Rynhel from SS. Cyril and Methodius Seminary in Orchard Lake. We also are joined by Leszek Trojanowski from Kielce and Przemek Frątczak from Poeznien. Our gathering tonight is further brightened by the people in Polish costume. (Please stand.) And to further enhance our celebration, we have the Polka Music Sound who has been with us every year since 1994.

Our annual gathering with the music, the festive costumes, the many guests, is like a Polish wedding. All we need is the bride and groom. Well, tonight we have two who are celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary: Bob and Jane Deachin! Congratulations!

This past August, twenty-two of us had the privilege of going to Poland and the Czech Republic. It was truly wonderful. The Catholic way of life in Poland was so visible. Churches were full; and no matter what time we visited a church, people were at prayer. As Our Blessed Mother's feast day was approaching, literally thousands of youth were expected to gather at the Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Jasna Gora for her feast day. Many youth walked on foot for days to arrive at the shrine. The Faith is alive in Poland.

The opposite was found in the Czech Republic. Over 65% of Czechs claim to be atheistic or agnostic. In the main cathedral in Prague on Sunday, less than a total of 80 people gathered for Mass in a city that boasts some of the world's most beautiful churches. That's why, on his last visit to Poland, Pope John Paul II spoke about how the faith of Poland is called to be the salvation of Europe. How it was needed everywhere we went.

But the people were so genuine and hospitable. I am grateful to say that hospitality is still a trademark of our people. Come in! Eat! Drink! Join us! Whatever we have is yours! I am reminded that in many households at Christmas, a candle is lit in the window to welcome any weary traveler to stop in, and a place is set at the table for the Christ Child, too. In many ways, the people we encountered were like the widow in today's first reading who opened her home to a stranger in need. The spirit of hospitality prevailed.

Have you ever noticed that the word "hospitality" comes from the same source as two similar sounding words "hospice" and "hospital"? The word hospice means "shelter," and the word hospital means "a place of healing." In this light, we can examine some of our own words and actions toward other people. Do my words and actions provide a shelter for other persons when they are around me? If we take the word hospice to its limits, we are aware that the word hospice usually refers to a special kind of care or place meant for people who are dying.

We need to remember as we deal with one another—with fellow church members, with visitors, with others from the community—that there may be among us those who are dying! They are dying on the inside. For whatever reason, life is currently treating them harshly and they feel broken. Some are dying just to know someone; they have few, if any, friends. Some are dying to feel connected; they don't feel like they belong to the human race any more. Some are dying to be affirmed; they are weary from feeling that they amount to nothing. Some are dying to be touched,

even if only by eye contact or by some word of acknowledgement from another human being. All of these people need hospitality. They need a place of shelter, no matter how fleeting, where they can catch another breath of air to sustain themselves.

In the spirit of today's reading, we might ask: What are the ways we could become ambassadors of hospitality? First, we should be friends to our friends. That may sound odd since hospitality often has to do with how we treat strangers, but consider how often in our busy lives we treat friends as strangers. Our lives are full of many activities and when we are at home, we've got chores to catch up on and the television to fill any other moments.

Friends are fine, but do we ever think, "Don't call too often," and "don't lay your problems on me, I've got enough of my own"? Doesn't friendship mean at least that we are hospitable to one another? Doesn't friendship mean that the other person is important enough to us that we become present to them?

A second thing hospitality can mean is that we accept that interruptions can be an important part of life. Sure there are planned hospitality events such as when we invite people over for an open house or a cookout. In these cases we take on the role of hostess and host. But where hospitality really shines is when we practice it in moments when we weren't expecting to...when an Elijah of some kind shows up and interrupts our plans.

Ja cie Kocham.

God bless you.

