

## Palm Sunday

**Matthew 26:39.** He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will.”



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Matthew is my favorite Gospel and this particular passage speaks to several facets of my life these days, both at St. John Parish, which is my foundation, but also in my work. It all seems to be conceptual, relational, and it seems that we have no control over any of it! A person can lay groundwork that is conceptual and hope that the vision a person has will move forward. We have no idea where it will all lead, nor do we have control over it because it is not about our agenda, it's about God's plan.

In my professional life I work in Mission, and I report to the Vice-President of Mission. It's all about our Catholic identity and reclaiming our Catholic identity. To me, this is relational to what we do here at St. John. We know that we are Catholic, but what does that mean? As the church changes more and more lay people must take on leadership roles. We are witnessing the same thing in Catholic Health Care. The sisters aren't there in numbers anymore. They are there in a sponsorship role, turning their ministries over to lay persons. Many of us are saying, "We're not ready. Tell us what to do." The sisters have received guidance from God and we must trust that God will guide us as well.

So, there is a conceptual problem that can go two ways: We can ask who we are as Catholics, but we also must ask how other non-Catholic people see us. This is a great challenge. I deal with employees from all faith traditions who are working in Catholic health care and understand that we are different and are not quite sure why. They lay claim to their own territory there.

This correlates with the Church as well. We have new people coming into the church who see us in many different ways and come to us for many different reasons. But we have to ask ourselves what it means to be collectively "catholic," that is, "universal."

Some may look at the Catholic Church and see that each individual church has its own culture, with people gravitating to a church because they see something there they are looking for. So many people see the Catholic Church as pre-

Vatican II and have experienced this in some way. People from that time didn't always feel hopeful.

Today we need to create hope for people. We need to help people find their own identity within the Catholic Church – what it means for them to be Catholic - instead of what has been dictated to them. We have to always go back to Christ, who only said we had to be a loving people.

The passage says, "Let this cup pass from me, not as I will but as you will." We must offer ourselves to God so that we can be his instruments of reformation in the Church. Through our actions and our involvement, changes will take place. I have watched the Pastoral Council evolve. I was on it for a while and then had to take a break because my term of service was up. It is a slow process, but we are closer now to realizing a part of that vision and it's very exciting to be a part of that. The people around the table have changed a bit. They're now realizing that their goal as members is to be representative and inclusive of all the people who gather at St. John. It's not about them only, it is about the inclusion of all with a total concept of parish. That's the challenge.

Prayer and dialogue can bring about the redefining of who we are as church. It brings about an awareness of the person next to you. Dialogue helps us understand each other. The word Catholic means "universal" and we have to learn to be inclusive and accepting of everyone.

We're doing ongoing leadership formation programs for our management at work. We have many people that have been there for many years, but don't understand that concept of inclusion. These programs are designed to help them understand and also bring them into the conversation because we need to dialogue about our similarities and differences.

The church does that, too. We invite people to dialogue about the Scriptures and how they relate to our lives. They also invite us to be more tolerant of each other in order that we might create the future God has planned for each of us.

Many churches are not willing to allow this open exchange. Thank heaven for our church! We need to explore what is specifically Catholic about us, but also what is universal about us, too.

I work with people in diverse faith traditions and dialogue opens up opportunities for everyone to feel accepted. There are more similarities than differences. People are on a similar journey, but come to fulfillment on different paths. They're looking for acceptance and hope, and they're looking for something that gives them some stability in this world.

Christ's arms are big enough for all of us.

We're all invited to have a part to play in this great work of ministry. The collective energy of all the members of the church gives voice to who we are as a community today and who we are to become as a community in the future. We can envision the future but we cannot predict the outcome exactly as it will unfold. We have to have faith that it will unfold according to God's plan, letting ourselves be instruments of the plan.

It's the role of the Pastoral Council to set the stage for who and what our St. John community is to be. We must create the foundation from which hope flows, like a never-ending stream. Each ministry has a responsibility of assuring that hope continues to flow, that it doesn't stop with the people sitting at the table, but continues to weave within the different ministries. Sitting together gives us the opportunity not only to dialogue, but to act on the Gospel message. "Preach the Gospel always. If necessary, use words." (St. Francis of Assisi)

We are at a time when a sense of focus is needed now more than ever before. Not for our own salvation, but for those yet to come. We need to create an environment from which hope springs, creating vibrant ministry so that people can not only be a part of these ministries, but benefit from them.

*If you are interested in serving the parish as a lector or eucharistic minister, please contact our office staff at 653-2377.*

*St. John Pastoral Council invites your observations and ideas. Check this website or the parish bulletin for upcoming meeting dates.*