

A.M.D.G.

State of the Parish Address St. John Fisher Church

October 9, 2016

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Naaman, a general in the Syrian army, was afflicted with leprosy. He would do anything to be healed—even if it meant going to the neighboring country, Israel, and beg for healing from the prophet Elisha. Elisha told him something pretty basic: wash yourself 7 times in the Jordan River. Though reluctant at first, Naaman did just that and was healed. Elisha showed that the God of Israel was the God of all. Naaman became a worshiper of the one true God, the God of Israel. Naaman's faith became his means of salvation.

In today's Gospel we see God's saving action extended to another foreigner: a Samaritan. Jews and Samaritans were enemies. Jesus, however, saw no one as his enemy. When he traveled from Galilee to Judea, he took a route through Samaria and encountered 10 lepers. Nine were Jews; one was a Samaritan. All 10 cried out for help. Jesus did not discriminate; he cleansed all 10 from their leprosy. However, only one was saved: the Samaritan. He alone returned to give thanks to Jesus. Note the words of Jesus: "Stand up and go; your faith has saved you." Faith and gratitude are linked. As the Samaritan was saved through his faith and expressed gratitude for his healing, we too should be people of faith and full of gratitude for how God has touched us.

As the faith community of St. John Fisher, we are called to reach out to the needy regardless of their affiliation. Pope Francis proclaimed this year as a Jubilee Year with the theme of mercy. The banner on our Church, visible from the street, reminds all who pass by. Our parish mission is: Love God. Love all people. Make disciples. Today's annual State of the Parish Address is my 18th here at St. John Fisher. My address this year will be through the lens of our parish mission statement and the Jubilee year of mercy.

The parish sponsored two pilgrimages to parishes designated as destinations for the Jubilee Year: St. Anthony, Long Beach, and American Martyrs, Manhattan. Some of our teens attended the one at American Martyrs. Your Pastoral Council also suggested that in this year of mercy we do some specific acts of mercy, whether corporal and spiritual. After completing it, we were asked to write it on a mercy card and drop it in one of the two clear plastic boxes in the narthex of the Church. If you haven't done it yet, it's not too late. The Jubilee Year ends next month.

Last December Matthew Kelly, author of *Dynamic Catholic*, gave a morning presentation on how to live your faith every day. Over 800 tickets were sold. It was a great evangelization tool. This past Lent Jon Leonetti conducted our annual parish mission. He gave his talk twice each day, one in the morning and one in the evening. It proved to be a great community builder. The response was overwhelming. Each day surpassed the turnout of the previous day, beginning with 150-200 Sunday evening and ending up with 250 on Tuesday evening. He spoke on living a faith-filled life, the importance of prayer, and the importance of saints, past and present.

For the second year we offered *Sanctus*, a day of prayer, reflection, and sharing. It is conducted by your fellow parishioners and takes place on a Saturday beginning at 8:30 and ending with the 5:00 Mass. It was offered twice this past year. It has been so successful that there is a waiting list. The next one will take place in the Spring.

This year completed the first year of our video ministry, a wonderful instrument of evangelization. It involves live-streaming the 9:00 Mass, so that the parishioners who cannot be with us at Mass because

of illness or physical incapacity can still view it. As you may notice, at the end of Mass, the priest calls to the altar the Eucharistic Ministers to the sick. Once they pick up their vessels containing the hosts, he formally dismisses them to bring Communion to the shut-ins. One of our Eucharistic Ministers reported that when she brought Communion to the home, the person brightened up and said: "I saw you in church." Live streaming the Mass has extended beyond its original, intended viewership. The weekly hits have ranged from 173 to 627. Anyone on vacation can keep track of what is going on back home at the parish. For some away from the church for many years, viewing it at home may be the first step in returning.

Family Promise of South Bay is a cooperative effort of parishes and congregations in our region who commit themselves to house homeless for one full week four times a year. This past year was the second year of our involvement. We are committed to continue this ministry.

The new church's prominence on the corner of Crest and Crenshaw has attracted more people here. When we took a census count last October, we found that our attendance had increased 1% from the previous year, which had increased 9% from the previous year. Pastoral Council members are counting at the Masses this weekend and next, so we'll see if the trend continues.

The numbers for sacramental services from July 1, 2015, to June 30, 2016 were as follows: 30 infant Baptisms, 100 1st Communions, 96 Confirmations, 38 Weddings, and 63 Funerals. This is the first year in which funerals exceeded baptisms. Weddings were up 37% from the previous year, which were up 50% from the previous year. I expect its numbers will continue to increase.

Our parish is marked by its outreach toward our needy brothers and sisters. So many of our programs are focused on that: the parish giving tree; Adopt-a-Family; food pantry; Agapé; Obra Buena; sandwich and hot food ministry; Palos Verdes Resale Thrift Shop; groups supporting various missions throughout the world. There are 10 charities in our area that rely on our monthly support. These acts of mercy are not just for the Jubilee Year; they are ongoing.

Our parish school offers Catholic education and formation from Kindergarten through 8th grade. This past year the school welcomed an accreditation team from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. It received the highest accreditation that is good for six years. My main concern right now is that we are not fully enrolled. To help that, we are striving to establish a Transitional Kindergarten for 4-year olds that will prepare them to enter our Kindergarten.

This past year the school inaugurated the Monsignor Gilb Tuition Opportunity Program. Its purpose is to provide financial aid to families who otherwise would not be able to attend the school and to increase the school endowment. You may have received a brochure that explained the program and that asked for support. We thank those who have already supported this program.

Our Sunday Religious Education classes offer an ongoing graded-level program for as long as the children are in school. In recent years more and more sports teams are having their practices and games on Sundays. I encourage parents to accompany their children to the 9:00 Mass and, after a serving of donut holes and orange juice to bring them to their 10:30 class. It is difficult for families to make the commitment to church when our society is luring them away and saying these are more important.

With construction complete for the church and parish activity center, we are paying off the loan. We still owe about 1 million dollars. The sooner the pledges are fulfilled, the less we have to pay in interest. I am grateful to all of you who have been faithfully fulfilling your pledges. I am hoping to have this loan paid off in full before the year is out.

Since our parish began *Campaign 21*, it has committed itself to support the parish of Sagrado Corazón in Cudahy in their efforts to build a church. After overcoming all the obstacles the city has

placed before them, the people of that parish are finally going to be able to start construction. The finance officer of the Archdiocese told me personally that the commitment of support of St. John Fisher parish was a key element that enabled the Archdiocese to give them the green light. The latest word is that they will begin construction this Fall. I'll keep you posted on the progress.

You may notice a plastic sheet hanging from the wall behind the choir area. That will soon house the pipes for a new organ. When the church was being built, there was not enough money in the budget for a pipe organ. For the past few years our music director, Grant Hungerford, led a campaign to fund the money for an organ and just this year successfully completed the campaign. No money came from the parish account. It is being paid by the donations of over 100 parishioners specifically for the organ. See more information about it on the parish web site.

For the past three years St. John Fisher Church, under the sponsorship of our pastoral council, has had a booth at the Street Fair at Peninsula Center. This past June 331 adults and 190 children visited our booth. Three people signed up for additional information, and 2 were looking to join our parish. There were 10 Inquiries on the school's transitional Kindergarten. It is a way of reaching out to the community who might not otherwise know who we are. Evangelization in practice.

In the pews is a 4-page laminated card to guide people through Mass. It not only contains the prayers and practical instructions for participating at Mass. It includes a map of the church interior and a description of all the rooms in the church. This card was the product of a joint effort of the pastoral council and the pastoral staff. It is our hope that not only parishioners but visitors will find this welcoming and helpful.

This past year we replaced all the chairs in Barrett Hall. The old ones had been around for 30 years and had seen better days. I hope you find the new ones comfortable. Last year during my talk I mentioned that we brought into the Parish Activity Center dividers to muffle the reverberation that had made it difficult to hear during Mass and other events. To make it permanent, we installed acoustical panels on the walls.

Last year the Archdiocesan Office of Religious Education inaugurated a weekend youth event, called City of Saints. It takes place in August at UCLA. 16 teens from our parish attended. They spent 3 days meeting top nationally-known speakers and enjoying an entertaining Christian band from our own South Bay. Everyone who attended said they would go again next year and that they were truly uplifted by the Holy Spirit!

This Sunday we will be celebrating our call to stewardship at the parish life fair. In my brief address it is impossible to list all the activities that take place here. So I strongly urge you after Mass to follow the balloons to stop by the Parish Activity Center. For many of you it may be the first time you have been there since it was a church. Once inside visit the many tables and discover how many and varied are our ministries. Over 80 ministries and organizations exist in our parish. You may find one that suits you.

I hope we will continue to be faithful stewards and dedicated disciples and work in his service. Let us be ever mindful of our mission: "Love God. Love all people. Make disciples." As I go into my 18th year as your pastor, I am grateful for the opportunity to minister to you, and I appreciate all your support. You are a very gifted community, and I know that you will continue to utilize your gifts in gratitude for what you have received and in service of your brothers and sisters.