

## State of the Parish Address St. John Fisher Church

Monsignor David A. Sork, Pastor

As we listen to today's Gospel, we can sense that Jesus' disciples were taken aback by the challenge he extended to the man with many possessions. Their surprise was even greater when Jesus told them how difficult it is for the rich to enter God's Kingdom. Mark tells us they were amazed and exceedingly astonished. There was a world where riches were regarded as a blessing from God for the just and upright. Wealth offered security and a sense of well-being. To give all that up seemed senseless. But Jesus was inviting those who would be his own to find the basis of their security and well-being not in transient riches or possessions, but in him. Could they do that? Did they even want to do that? The dismay of the disciples is clearly reflected in their question to Jesus: "Then, who can be saved?"

Up to that point, the disciples had been thinking like the man with many possessions. He had come to Jesus asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" as if such a gift could be earned. Both the disciples and the man who went away sad were focusing on themselves, their efforts, their obedience and their accomplishments instead of focusing on God and on grace. Once again, Jesus' response was intended to shift their focus from themselves to God: "For human beings, it is impossible ... all things are possible for God." In challenging the young man to give up his possessions to follow Jesus, Jesus is challenging us as well. Every challenge, every demand Jesus places upon his disciples becomes possible if, by faith, the disciple has learned to rely on grace and to approach each challenge as an opportunity to respond to God's call. This we cannot do alone. We need one another. That is why we have the Church.

As the local church, the faith community of St. John Fisher, we are called to work together in service to others and for God's glory. Our mission is: Love God. Love all people. Make disciples. It is in this light that I want to speak with you. Today's annual State of the Parish Address is my 17<sup>th</sup> here at St. John Fisher. My address this year will be through the lens of Jesus' challenge to us, as I strive to highlight things that have taken place this past year.

This past year we began utilizing our former church as a parish activity center. If you go inside it, you will see that it is set up for both basketball and volleyball. During the day the school uses it for physical education, the seniors use it for a physical fitness program, and the school's volleyball and basketball teams play their interscholastic activities there. The teens have had movie nights for fun and even for serious events, like the showing of *The Passion of the Christ* during Lent. I noticed from the first time we used it that the noise of bouncing balls and screaming athletes reverberated throughout the gym. When we had the first Mass in it last Christmas, the echo effect made it difficult to hear the celebrant preach or the lectors read. One of our projects was to resolve this noise issue. When we had Mass there this past Easter, we brought in dividers from Barrett Hall to help muffle the sound. Something more permanent was needed. Just this past week, acoustical material was installed in the gym.

The parish activity center has two other rooms. One is the plaza room, which is used for a variety of activities, including adult education classes and classes for those interested in becoming Catholic. The other room is the Teen Lounge. It is used almost exclusively for our

teenagers to meet, hang out, and even have prayer sessions. *Catholic Underground* hosted our Confirmation Year I day retreats 3 times in the parish activity center, utilizing all three rooms.

A year ago we conducted a survey in anticipation of the Synod of Bishops on the Family. This past winter you received an executive summary of the results. I sent the same summary to Archbishop Gomez. He thanked me and told me he would be bringing that survey with him to Rome where he is one of the delegates to the Synod. I hope that what you told us has some kind of effect over there. This is the first time that any Pope asked the opinion of the people.

This past March Father Richard Leonard from Australia conducted our parish mission. He gave his talk twice each day, one in the morning and once in the evening. The response was overwhelming. Each day surpassed the turnout of the previous day. The participants ranged from teens to the most senior, and in between including the parents of children and youth. He seemed to have touched a nerve on all.

At a mission conducted the previous year by Bill Huebsch, he recommended a one-day retreat for people deal who cannot make weekend retreats. We took his advice and began *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. We offer it twice a year. You may have heard one of our parishioners talk about it last weekend. It has been so successful that there is a waiting list. That's a nice problem to have.

During this past year the Pastoral Council has discerned and helped implement two new programs in the parish: video ministry and Family Promise of South Bay. The discernment process for both was long and thorough. They saw it as a wonderful instrument of evangelization. Video ministry 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 witness that Mass. Even those who don't have computers have received from the parish devices that enable their TV sets to see the live stream. I am so pleased at the number of people who came forward to be a part of this. We began last month.

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. Although the Pastoral Council did their discernment and field work and recommended that we be a part of this, it only began last May when there were enough parishes to provide housing every week of the year. This program could not have been successful without the volunteer efforts of so many of our parishioners. I am particularly grateful to Dave and Yolanda Williams, who agreed to coordinate this program. We hosted our first group in June and have done it two more times since then. One of the success stories I am happy to share is that one of the families has gotten back on its feet, found employment, and is not longer homeless.

This past August, our thrift shop, Palos Verdes Resale, had a gala dinner celebrating their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Around 200 people were present. Since its foundation it has distributed over \$2 million to local charities out of its revenue. PV Resale has been a success beyond the most optimistic expectations of all.

Having the new church has attracted more people here. It is more visible than it was before. Our landscaping around the church along with the staircase on Crest Road has made the church more appealing and welcoming. Your parish received the garden sign award from the

Silver Spur Garden Club for the “Garden of the Season.” You may have seen the article in *Peninsula People*. When we took a census count last October, we found that our attendance had increased 8% 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, 2014, to June 30, 2015 were as follows: 59 Baptisms, 104 1<sup>st</sup> Communions, 81 Confirmations, 24 Weddings, and 52 Funerals. Weddings were up 50% from the previous year. I expect its numbers will continue to increase.

This Sunday we are celebrating our call to stewardship at the parish life fair. In my brief address it is impossible to list all the activities that take here. So I strongly urge you after Mass to stop by and visit the many tables and discover how our community responds to God's call in their life. Over 80 ministries and organizations exist in our parish. You may find one that suits you. God calls all, and I hope that more will heed that call.

Our parish school offers Catholic education and formation from Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. It is an integral part of our parish, and the school does its part to follow the parish’s mission as it helps form our children into disciples of Jesus. This past summer one of the classrooms was converted into a science laboratory. There is also a new science curriculum. Beginning this year Spanish is being taught in all grades from K-8.

This past year the school inaugurated the Monsignor Gilb Scholarship Program. Its purpose is to provide financial aid to families who otherwise would not be able to attend the school. We welcome others who would like to support this program.

Our Sunday Religious Education classes are bursting at the seams with new families coming and wanting to be part of our community. One of the challenges is with sports. In recent years more and more sports teams are having their practices and games on Sundays. We do our best to accommodate these parents as they strive to do the right thing—but sometimes, like the rich young man in today’s Gospel, they go away sad. 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 the construction complete for the church and parish activity center, we are paying off the loan for construction. We still owe about 1.5 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 still welcome new people to be a part of this tremendous project.

Since the parish began *Campaign 21*, it has committed itself to support the parish of Sagrado Corazón in Cudahy in their efforts to build a church. Construction has still not yet begun. There have been delays after delays in plodding through all the red tape. The latest word is that they will begin construction next September. I’ll keep you posted on the progress.

I cannot let this talk pass without mentioning Monsignor Gilb, our Pastor Emeritus. He had been living at Nazareth House in West Los Angeles. He was not happy there because he was so far from this community whom he has served since 1985. The good news is that the Jeanne Jagan Home in San Pedro, operated by the Little Sisters of the Poor, found room for him. He loves it there, and is around here much more. At times he will pop up at the 5:15 Mass. I enjoy seeing him around. Feel free to visit him.

A.M.D.G.

The Lord has challenged us to let go and give of ourselves for the kingdom of God. 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 17<sup>th</sup> year as your pastor, I am grateful for ministering to you and appreciate all your support. You are a very gifted community, and I hope that you will continue to utilize your gifts for the glory of God and the service of your brothers and sisters.