

Baptism of the Lord

Thank you all for the support you give St. Anthony Parish. Over the past few years our finances have improved: We have paid off our debt and expanded our staff. We pay our bills each week. The finance council meets with me regularly, and they note that contributions in the weekly envelope are going up, and the cash without envelopes is going down. Both of these are good trends. They show that you are willing to sacrifice for our church. Some people come in and out of our doors without ever making a contribution, but they could not come here at all in search of solace if we were not here making our sacrifices.

We call mass a sacrifice because we participate in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We also offer ourselves in sacrifice to God. When the priest says, "Pray... that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God," we are praying that God will be pleased with the sacrifice that each individual here makes. The weekly collection makes our sacrifice real. Whenever we have a second collection, ushers here take it up right after the first so that your entire financial sacrifice comes in procession together with the bread and wine. When those gifts are placed on the altar, we place ourselves there too.

Our finances have improved partly because we receive help from outside the parish. Visitation and St. Thomas More send us a donation every few months; so does the diocese. We receive gifts from some generous non-members. Last year we received many hours of volunteer services from Father Mike and Deacon Tom. In the United States parishes try to pay their employees a fair wage. This is more common in the US than in other English-speaking countries or in Latin America, but this is how parishes function here. The money you contribute pays my salary and the salaries of other employees. It covers utilities and the needs of our office from copy paper to the internet. Your contributions make a difference, but we do not receive enough to sustain our parish without other donors.

We have other needs. People in wheelchairs cannot easily access the building. The ramp is too steep, and it is deteriorating. Even if they can get in, they cannot use a restroom without going up an additional step or down a flight of stairs. Our financial goals include paying our bills, improving our building, and relying less on outside help. Wouldn't it be marvelous if some day St. Anthony's could give generously to other parishes in the way that we have received?

Next weekend I'm going to ask you to think about increasing your gift to St. Anthony's this year. I'll explain why it is important to use envelopes each week, and to plan your gift ahead of time. Only a small percentage of our members use envelopes, so I know it will be hard to convince you. But I also know you love our church and that you want to sacrifice to God in an acceptable way.

In today's first reading from Isaiah, the prophet asks the people, "Why spend your money for what is not bread, your wages for what fails to satisfy?" When you make your offering, you will receive the blessings that God promised Isaiah: "Just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there until they have watered the earth... so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth." God will receive our sacrifices, and they will bear fruit because we cooperate with God's powerful word every time we give.

Sunday, January 11, 2015