

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

St. Anthony Catholic Church is the spiritual home of many exceptional people. Most of you live close by, but many do not; still, you make this church a priority in your lives. Some of you belong to organizations such as the Altar and Rosary Society, the Knights of Columbus, or the Boy Scouts of America. Many of you help us as liturgical ministers - altar servers, greeters, ushers, readers, sacristans, communion ministers, musicians and church decorators. Some of you bring communion to the homebound. We have groups that gather for devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament on the first Monday and the first Saturday of every month. We have devoted catechists who help children prepare for sacraments on Wednesday nights and a stable group of adults who come for faith formation at the same time. We have engaged couples preparing for marriage and parents preparing for the baptism of their infant children. We offer services in different languages. We have a strong finance council and parish staff. We have special celebrations for All Souls Day, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Posada, the Epiphany, the Presentation of the Lord, St. Joseph's Day, and the Feast of St. Anthony. In addition, you enjoy one another's company even outside of anything structured at the church.

Today as we celebrate our patronal feast, I especially acknowledge our youth. Our confirmation program has grown thanks to Kathy Palmer, and now to Cathy Hernandez and Claudia Villegas. We have young people who want to stay connected to parish life. They help us in liturgical ministries. They raise funds. They reach out to the poor and the needy. Many of our youth are bilingual. They are staying in school. They get jobs. They contribute to their families, the parish and the neighborhood. They have strong character, good values and future vision. We have great young people here, and that means we have great parents.

This is especially striking because the years of adolescence are some of the most difficult. Typically young people are not only discovering who they are, but they also want to establish their independence. This causes stress in families. Parents want their children to grow strong and to become themselves, but they want them to do it in the right way with good values. They want their kids to have freedom, but they want them to use their freedom well.

That was how St. Paul felt about the Galatians. In Christ they were no longer bound by the old rules. Paul told them, "For freedom Christ set us free.... You were called for freedom, brothers and sisters. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love." Paul wanted them to use their freedom not to gratify the desire of the flesh, but to accept the guidance of the Spirit. Parents surely feel the same way about teenage children. They want them to enjoy the freedom of who they are, but not for the sake of gratifying themselves. Parents want youth to express love for others. In truth, this does not just apply to teens. All adults need to use our freedom responsibly as well. We are free to choose something that gives us pleasure, or something that will please someone else. We are free to follow the desires of the flesh or the guidance of the Spirit. All our choices are made in freedom. When we choose wisely, we are good children of God and good members of St. Anthony Catholic Church.