

## Second Sunday of Easter

Next month I celebrate the 50th anniversary of my graduation from eighth grade. I attended St. Therese Little Flower Grade School at 58th and Michigan. I've reconnected with some of my classmates, and we are inviting other alumni to a celebration next month - mass and a social - at the church and parish hall on the actual anniversary of the day we graduated. Our principal, Sr. Therese Pfeifer, later worked at St. John Francis Regis Church. In 1989 I became the pastor there. She and I had stayed friends all those many years, but when I first arrived at that parish, I told my former principal with a smile, "It's a good thing we got along when I was in eighth grade - because now I'm your boss." My classmates and I are proud of our Catholic education, and it's one of the reasons I'm happy that schools like Holy Cross, Cristo Rey and St. Pius are here today.

However, my classmates and I share another memory. We had one teacher - and let me emphasize it was only one teacher - who was abusive toward us. She yelled at us irrationally. She hit us. Some of us remember that, when we were 6 years old, we were so afraid to ask permission to go to the bathroom that we wet our pants. That only got us into worse trouble. It was around that time, at that very early age in my life, when I first felt that God was calling me to become a priest. Today I wonder if that was partly a reaction to abuse. I knew that something wasn't right, and perhaps I was being called to bring kindness and respect into the world through a religious vocation. I don't know. I'm 64; it's hard to know what I was thinking at the age of 6. I knew I wanted to thank God for the blessings I had received, and that abuse was wrong.

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month. Our diocese has designated this coming Wednesday as a special day of prayer. The Catholic Church has tried to correct past mistakes on the sexual abuse of children, and we are probably the first diocese to put a day on the calendar inviting people to pray about it every year. Bishop Johnston will celebrate mass at the cathedral at 12:15. The Catholic Center at 9th and Baltimore will have exposition of the Blessed Sacrament through the workday. We will ask God's help to protect our children.

Here at St. Anthony's, I worry about it. At parish events - Sunday mass, traditional feasts, religious education sessions - I often see unsupervised children. They play outside, they run through the building, and they go to the bathroom without the supervision of an adult. I have no children, and I do not fully appreciate the sacrifice, work and love that parents give. But when I see unsupervised children on our property, it looks careless. It looks as though parents think children are safe when they are in a public place. We all need to protect our children, watch them, care for them, and nurture them. Kids should feel at home at St. Anthony's. But one way that children feel at home is when their parents are mindful of them.

Today's first reading describes the church after the resurrection of Jesus. His followers lived in community. They shared prayer; they shared possessions. Those with less benefited from those who had more. At St. Anthony's our most precious possessions are our children. Let us look after them like one big family. Let us help them know that we care enough about them that we will watch them and protect them every moment of every day.

**SUNDAY, APRIL 23, 2017**