

I have two announcements – both good news, so you can relax. First, the Vatican recently issued new guidelines for communion on behalf of people who are unable to consume normal bread or wine for serious reasons. For example, some people have gluten intolerance. The bread we use for mass must have some gluten, but we may now use low-gluten hosts. We have some with less than one hundredth of one percent gluten. If anyone needs these in order to receive communion, please let me know. For those who cannot take alcohol, we may now use a special grape juice called mustum, which is preserved without pasteurization or freezing. I will make this option available at the Saturday night mass on this side of the church. If you cannot receive communion under the form of wine, come to this side and indicate to the minister that you need the other cup. Parents, this is not meant to be a kids' table; it is preferable to receive the blood of Christ under the form of wine; this option is for those cannot.

Second, Pope John Paul announced this week a new coadjutor bishop for our diocese. Msgr. Robert Finn of St. Louis will become a bishop in May, but he will not govern the diocese until Bishop Raymond Boland retires. Bishop Boland just turned 72; bishops must retire at 75. Bishop Boland is a colon cancer survivor, and he has high iron in his blood. Last year he asked the Holy Father to appoint a coadjutor to help the transition of office. Bishop Boland may wish to retire before turning 75, and when he does, our new bishop will be Robert Finn. Our diocese is grateful to the pope for his pastoral care.

In today's second reading, Paul offers pastoral care to the Corinthians. He says their journey to the promised land of heaven resembles the journey of their ancestors through the desert. Ancient Israel followed the pillar of cloud and passed through the Red Sea, and they were, to use Paul's words, "baptized into Moses." Then they ate manna, a spiritual food, and drank water from the rock, a spiritual drink. Paul says the rock followed them through the desert, and then he adds provocatively, "the rock was Christ." In Paul's view, Christ was present to the Israelites in the desert, and Christ is present to us as we journey under clouds of confusion, across the waters of baptism, nourished by the spiritual food and drink of the eucharist with Christ the rock as our companion.

This evening several baptized Christians among us have asked to enter the full communion of the Catholic Church. They have made a spiritual journey, they have searched their souls for the presence of God, and they have heard the promptings of the Spirit. Tonight they receive spiritual food and drink for the first time. If you have ever hungered for God, you know the kind of journey they have made. If you have ever received an answer to your prayers, you know the joy that is theirs.

During Lent our church reminds us that life is a desert, but Christ is anxious to be our companion, offering us whatever sustenance we need to make the journey home.

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And we should be grateful to God for the love we receive in many ways. Paul tells the Romans today, “the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” When we were baptized, God poured out the Holy Spirit on us.

Today we begin the first of three scrutinies for our elect. Scrutinies are prayers for those preparing for baptism. Scrutinies are meant to uncover and heal whatever is weak and sinful in them, and to reveal and strengthen whatever is good. They are prayers of exorcism, asking God to drive out the spirit of evil, and they are prayers of encouragement, asking God to send in the Holy Spirit.

Throughout Lent, we all do battle with our sins. We accept penance and ask God to drive out what is evil inside us, and to strengthen the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out into our hearts with so much love.

As we pray for these elect, let us recommit ourselves to the hard work of the spiritual journey, facing our sins with courage because we stand with the Spirit in grace.

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