

Last weekend we asked your opinion about a new Mass schedule. Tomorrow night is when we'll make the decision.

Talking with people about this, I'm picking up a sense of loss. A year ago four priests served St. Regis every weekend. Starting next month we'll have two, and one is retired. A few years ago we had six Masses every weekend and now we'll have four. I grew up in a parish of 800 families and four priests. Now a parish that size has one priest and it's rare to find more than two together anywhere. So sensing loss seems reasonable.

But there are positive factors. One is that in the United States the Catholic Church has more members than any religion. And although the number of priests in this country has declined, lay ministries have exploded. Today there are salaried lay employees in Catholic parishes like never before. They're well educated and they care for people. The local media have praised the new Baptist church in Raytown because their membership is approaching 5000. And that's wonderful. Of course, ours has been at 5000 for years, but that's not news, because Catholic parishes for the most part are larger than those of other denominations. It's hard to read the signs of the times today.

At the time of the apostles the church looked much different. There were no big church buildings till the fourth century; there weren't crucifixes till the fifth century. There weren't even pews till the thirteenth century. But there were Christians, there was eucharist, and there were priests who led the service. Where did they have church? In homes. "Parishes" were so tiny that people had Mass every week in their homes.

St. Luke was a product of that church. So when you open up today's Gospel you can tell it's by St. Luke. He emphasizes prayer--you gotta just stop and spend time with Jesus. He puts women in the forefront: Jesus goes into the home of women who are not his relatives and educates one of them. Both these themes, prayer and women, come out in Luke. But the other way to tell it's Luke is where the episode takes place. Luke mentions the word "home" 28 times more than any other Gospel. Why? Because when Luke wrote this Gospel fifty years after Jesus died, that's where the church was. It was in homes.

The Catholic Church has changed mightily in the last thirty years, but some things will stay the same: We will believe in Christ; we will celebrate eucharist; and we will have priests.

I want to ask your help. Make your home a church; a place where people pray, a place where people talk about the Bible, about their lives, and about the parish--not just to criticize it, but to take pride in our community. Come to church; make it a regular part of your life. Join our organizations; take part in our activities. And finally, help us find priests, sisters, and brothers. Next weekend we're going to ask you for names of single young men and women age 16 and up whom you believe could serve our church. We'll contact them, but we'd like to tell them their names came from you. Last weekend over 700 people expressed their opinion about Mass schedules. I'd love to get 700 cards next week recommending names for religious life out of this parish. Jesus will be a guest in our home on the day we invite him in.