

Homily for the 6th Sunday in Ord.
Feb. 14-15, "B"

St. Paul, in his missionary work, wanted most to leave people with the powerful news of Jesus love and forgiveness. He also wanted them to know and understand the freedom that comes from that love and forgiveness.

But if, as St. Paul states, we have freedom from the law, why does he also tell us we must embrace the Law?

Paul understood that the law of God leads us to live according to the love of God. When Faith moves us from duty to love, we no longer feel the burden of the law. We still embrace the duty of living as sons and daughters of God, but, rather than being compelled by a law, we are compelled by love, a desire to do what is pleasing to God because our love of God puts within us a burning desire to know and seek His will.

In his mission to the Corinthians, it seems that St. Paul tried something new. He first spoke to them about the love of God and the freedom that we have because of God's love. St. Paul assumed that the Corinthians would naturally understand the duty and the commitments that come from love.

But they didn't. So Paul had to keep going back to these people and filling in the missing pieces of the Christian message. That is why we have two letters to the Corinthians. In these letters St. Paul is very firm with them. He keeps calling them back to understanding the obligations and duties that go along with responsible love.

We can see that it is a tradition from Apostolic times that Pastors periodically will speak to the people of God to correct bad habits and call them to a more careful and thoughtful worship and a more intentional living of their faith.

In every Parish bad habits develop that a Pastor has a duty to address. Some of these habits come from a lack of knowledge and other come because the burdens of life distract us from giving thought to what we are doing as a people of faith.

So, I as your Pastor, wish to address some issues that I think come from misunderstandings and some that are just bad habits.

Here are a couple of practical issues that I should address when it comes to our worship. On entering this Church, because the Tabernacle is centrally located behind the Altar, it is most appropriate to genuflect before entering your pew, or when crossing in front of the Altar before or after Mass. Genuflection is a gesture that acknowledges that God is present among us, and that we owe Him our lives and our salvation. So we genuflect as a prayer of recognition and gratitude for choosing to make His home among us.

At the Our Father, it is not appropriate to hold hands, for various reasons, but mostly because this puts an emphasis on the Our Father that overshadows the purpose of that time of the Mass. That part of the Mass is a personal, penitential preparation that leads us to the most profound and important sign of our unity as a family of faith; it leads us to make the greatest statement of our unity, receiving Holy Communion.

In some places, including St. Mary Magdalen a custom has developed where some people raise their hands up in what is called the “orans” position during the doxology. During the celebration of the Mass, this is a gesture that is reserved to the Priest. In the Catholic Faith, the Priest stands in for Christ, so it is more true to say that it is Christ, Himself who leads the prayers of the people during the Mass. He does this through the agency of the Priest. Christ uses the Priest as His stand in to

offer these prayers to God the Father in the name of the people. To signify this, the Priest raises his hands up in prayer. This is especially true during the Our Father. The proper gesture for the congregation during the Our Father is folding your hands in prayer. This applies only during the public prayer and worship of the Church. At home or in your prayer group, you can use that gesture all you want.

After communion, the sign for when to be seated is when the doors of the Tabernacle are closed.

The next few things I want to address are simply bad habits. I would like them to stop, because they cause disruption to the Mass and confusion especially among the young people.

I have decided to post the starting times of the Mass so that every person will know for sure when the Mass begins. This way you will be able to plan to arrive at Mass at least five minutes before that designated starting time. If you know the time that Mass starts, you will be able to arrive on time, and find a seat even if it is near the front of the Church.

If you have had a gas explosion in your home, and have had to borrow cloths from the neighbors and thus have arrived late, please do not walk up the center aisle just before the Mass starts. And wait to use the center aisle till the Priest at least arrives at the Altar steps. That way we won't get trampled on the way in and people won't get confused as to who is saying Mass.

Do not leave Mass after communion. That's just wrong. It's rude. It's not good. The closing rites are an essential part of the Mass. The Mass is meant to prepare us and give us strength to be Christ's representatives in the world. The blessing and dismissal are a way that we are given God's grace to do this. Think of it this way. If you were invited to your Bosses house

for dinner, you would stay to the end of the dinner out of respect. What if your boss went to the kitchen to get desert, or clear the dishes, and on returning found you gone with no trace? It is even ruder when the Host is the Lord of love and life.

Do not stand in the back of the Church during Mass. There are rare times when the Church is so full that there are no seats available; usually Christmas Eve and Easter Sunday and one or two other times during the year. All other Sundays, there are always seats available. People in the pews should move in toward the center to make room. Sometimes I look back and see people standing back there and you could shoot a cannon off in the front to the Church and not hit anyone. If you were to get to Mass early it would not be troublesome to find a seat in the front. If you have had a gas explosion and had to borrow cloths from your neighbors, we don't mind you conning up the side aisle and finding a seat.

If you have to stand in the back because there are no seats available, be a part of the prayer of the Mass. Kneel at the appropriate times, especially during the consecration; you at least owe Christ that small gesture. If you can't do those simple gestures that are so much a part of our worship and are signs of our communion in prayer, you should stay home. You are not fulfilling any obligation to God by grudgingly holding the walls up back there. They will stand up on their own.

I know that I sound like a nagging, sour, old, curmudgeon, but I want to assure you that I am not that old. The things I have spoken to you about are important. Careful attention to them helps to support one another as the body of Christ. It strengthens our communion as we worship as a family of faith in the presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And it helps

to teach our young people the reverence and respect we owe to God for the love He has shown us.

Christ has chosen to come among us and be with us who he loves as His own bride. He pledges His life to us and demonstrates the power of His love by giving us His Body and Blood. We should never take what we do here for granted and we must always be conscious that we owe one another this respect as brothers and sisters who hope for eternal life with Christ.

Next week your bulletin will contain the first of four fliers which will cover in more detail the topics I have covered here.

I also wish to invite you to set aside your Tuesday evenings in Lent for a five week series of classes I will be teaching on the Roman Catholic Liturgy, its origins and its' development, and changes that the Bishops will be instituting in the next few years.