

[Readings: Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104; 1 Cor. 12:3b-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23]

*Veni Sancte Spiritus!* Come, Holy Spirit! The title of today's sequence, to be sung after the Second Reading and before the Gospel Acclamation, is an exuberant reminder of this robust and active feast we celebrate. There are four Sequences provided for four different feast days: Easter, Pentecost, Corpus Christi, and Our Lady of Sorrows. You probably would recognize the Sequence for Our Lady of Sorrows – the "Stabat Mater" which we sing after each of the Stations of the Cross.

I'm glad we sang the one for today's Feast of Pentecost. The Pentecost sequence underscores for us that the primary actor on Pentecost is not any one of the fishermen apostles, bravely preaching in the streets of Jerusalem like they were born to it. Rather, the sequence declares, it's the elusive Spirit that sheds divine light on our gloomy reality, comforting and refreshing us, healing our wounds, renewing our strength, and washing our guilt away. And that's just for starters.

Add to that guidance for all our straying steps, plus the bestowal of those seven gifts we once memorized to recite to our bishops on Confirmation day long ago. What are they? Wisdom. Understanding. Knowledge. Counsel. Fortitude. Reverence. Wonder and Awe in God's Presence, which we used to call Fear of the Lord. Cribbed from an ancient prophecy of Isaiah, this shower of gifts is available to all who acknowledge the indwelling Spirit. Do we believe this? How often do we use our sevenfold blessing -- or any single aspect of it? We do it quite well at St. Martin de Porres Parish. Now we need the bold courage to proclaim it our homes, our schools, our work and in the marketplace.

We may need fresh language to describe ancient understandings, but that doesn't make the concepts themselves obsolete. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we believers do need to be penetrated by the Divine. Jesus has breathed His Spirit on his Church. This act can change everything, and it's meant to. Here is how the Holy Spirit has changed this community of St. Martin de Porres over the past twelve months:

Our parish pictorial directory by Lifetouch has been completed. Almost 250 households had their photo taken. They are entitled to a free copy. Please stop by the office to pick up yours, if you had your photo taken.

The Parish Goal to reach out to the community is in motion. Our Evangelization Commission is looking to advertise in local free papers, to send e-mails to our parents and guardians in our Faith Formation program, to create those now-famous Robo-Calls to our registered and inactive parishioners to join us, and expanded our parish web site.

We are reaching out to the unchurched and the fallen-away Catholics with gifts at Christmas and Easter: Matthew Kelly's books: "Rediscover Christ" and "Beautiful Mercy."

We completed our beautiful welcome booklet for new parishioners. We hope to distribute a copy to each parish household so that you can review it over the summer, and prayerfully discern how you will be able to participate more fully in our parish life. All of our parish ministries and services need additional members. We are investigating sending a postcard invitation to every house within our parish boundaries, inviting them – and you -- to our Festival of Ministries in the fall.

The Education Commission sponsored the Martin Readers book review and offered adult formation series on Bible Study (Bible Timeline) and the Pope's letter on the environment. They also continue to find initiatives to bring young families to the Church. Christian Formation students brought the Nativity alive at our tree-trimming service in December. They also collected hundreds of pounds of plastic bottle caps and lids to help the environment.

In addition to its regular outreach, the Christian Service Commission sponsored its first mission trip to Kentucky with ten missionaries from St. Martin's. We are coordinating with St. Michael Parish in Sterling Heights to send a total of 18 missionaries this summer. We also learned how to say "Appalachia" the correct way!

A Colorful Art group was started. We participated in "Mercy in Action Day," which usually takes place in October by collecting medical supplies.

Sunday Offertory sacrificial giving online began, and we even have a link to this year's Catholic Services Appeal for those who would like to pledge electronically. Our Sunday collections are slowly squeaking close to budget, but as of today, we are still about \$10,000 below budget.

I've done many good things as pastor of St. Martin de Porres Parish, but some have told me that my greatest legacy at St. Martin's is the renovation of our church rest rooms! I still receive compliments and gratitude for the completed project. We also improved our church sound system, repaired our church door closers and installed new exterior doors to the parish hall. The next step with the doors of both buildings is to install handicap openers.

In honor of our 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a parish and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dedication of this church building, and in honor of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the vision and appearance of Our Lady of Fatima, I am commissioning a portrait of Mary and her Immaculate Heart, one of the three requests given by Mary at Fatima in 1917: "Promote

devotion to my Immaculate Heart." It will hang next to the portrait of the Divine Mercy in the church sanctuary. It will be sponsored by a gift given last Christmas by the Active Christian Women's Club, who celebrate their own anniversary – 40 years this year.

Also, with the recent generous donation made by a family in our parish, I hope to paint the large image of St. Martin in the back of church to compliment the soft-painted tones of the image of the Holy Family, also in the back of the church. I celebrated 35 years of ordained ministry last month, and Sr. Noreen O'Connell, a Dominican Sister living in our area, celebrates 70 years as a consecrated religious woman.

Speaking of the Archdiocese, we are not only connected as members of St. Martin de Porres Church, we are connected to the 24 parishes of the Central Macomb Vicariate, to the Archdiocese of Detroit, and to the Universal Church.

Pope Francis and Archbishop Allen Vigneron, have been encouraging the Church to embrace the "new evangelization", renewing the message of the Gospel in our own lives and sharing it with others. In the last twelve months, the archdiocese, and our parish, have had a number of experiences that have energized this effort. Last April, 2016, Archbishop Vigneron brought "The Amazing Parish Conference" to Detroit, the first for any diocese in the U.S.A to have all parishes in one diocese participating.

Over a period of eight months, parishes across the archdiocese hosted a three-night experience, "Come, Encounter Christ" -- evenings of praise and worship music, powerful preaching, and an opportunity for the sacrament of reconciliation, closing with Benediction. All of this, and much more, including the Holy Door at the cathedral for the Year of Mercy, led to the Archdiocesan Synod in November, 2016. Everyone who participated -- bishops, priests, deacons, religious, representatives of the faithful -- all spoke of the three days as being Spirit-filled!

This weekend, Archbishop Allen Vigneron released the long-awaited pastoral letter to all Catholics in southeast Michigan.

Copies of the pastoral letter will be distributed this summer. As a parish, we will dissect and digest its contents and apply what it calls for to our parish.

All of this, and much more to come, is a result of the events sponsored by the Archdiocese -- no parish, or even a vicariate, would have the resources to put on these experiences which are having an effect in the lives of the faithful. It is the Catholic Services Appeal that gives the Archdiocese the financial resources needed to sponsor the variety of programs and services that no single parish could undertake.

The culmination of a years-long process of prayer, dialogue and discernment,

the Archbishop's pastoral letter will focus on how to change the way God's Word is shared in four distinct areas: personal life, family life, parish life (local Catholic church communities), and from the administrative staff that directly supports Archbishop Vigneron, known as Central Services – affectionately referred to as “Downtown.”

This process began in 2014 with the observance of a Year of Prayer for a New Pentecost and branding a new evangelization initiative called “Unleash the Gospel.” It is hoped that as a result of this pastoral letter, all local communities will discover effective, modern ways to proclaim and live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I read somewhere that there are four levels of happiness. The first comes from momentary pleasure. It's all about me, it's all about right now. Instant gratification.

The second level of happiness is the personal satisfaction I receive for a task well-done. I have used my God-given talents to the best of my ability.

The third level of happiness is making a difference by helping others. When I see a need and respond to it generously, I make the presence of God real for the other person. And they, in turn, do the same for me.

The highest form of happiness is union with God. This happens when we are fully human, fully alive, fully open to the Holy Spirit, and as Matthew Kelly puts it, “being the very best version of myself.” This is why Jesus Christ came; this is why He sends the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God will make us one with God. When we open ourselves to receive the Spirit of God, we will be strong enough to inspire and empower others. The Holy Spirit helps sinful people to receive the power of God to repent of their sins. The Advocate will help us to stand next to God, and to “Unleash the Gospel” in our parish, in our Archdiocese and in the world! *Veni Sancte Spiritus!* Come, Holy Spirit! Breathe on us, O Spirit of God! ALLELUIA and AMEN!

[Readings: Exodus 34: 4b-6, 8-9; Daniel 3:52-55; 2 Cor. 13:11-13; John 3:16-18]

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.” Have you ever stopped to think about what the words of this greeting really means? If you have, then you have a grasp of today’s Solemn Feast of the Holy Trinity.

The “grace” of our Lord Jesus Christ. It’s been said that large people like me have “grace” when they dance. Quite frankly, I think it’s been a while since I’ve danced -- alone or with others! But “grace” doesn’t mean agility or ability. “Grace” comes from the Greek word, “charis” which really means “gift.”

The “gift” of our Lord Jesus Christ is what we NEED to get to Heaven, and I dare say, what we WANT to make our lives have purpose. Think about it. Jesus said, “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” I think that makes it quite clear that consciously, subconsciously, or unconsciously, we really, really do NEED Jesus Christ in order to experience repentance, forgiveness, salvation, joy and lasting peace.

And isn’t that “gift” of our Lord Jesus Christ also what we really, really WANT? Dorothy Day, the cofounder of the Catholic Worker movement, once wrote: “We have all known the long loneliness. And we know that the answer is love, love in community.” We look for love in all the wrong places, when it is here, in this holy place; when it is here, in our hearts, the whole time.

The “love” of God... There is only one word for love in English; there are at least three words for love in Greek. There is Philos, the love that brothers and sisters share. There is Eros, the love that only a husband and wife are supposed to share. Then there is Agape. It’s hard to describe Agape, other than to say that it is the complete and unconditional love and faithfulness that God shows us as God’s favorite creation. We hear in our First Reading God’s description of Himself: “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” Complete and unconditional love and faithfulness. You and I are incapable of such perfect love. But we do catch glimpses of it from time to time.

But again, that love is available to each of us. From God Himself.

Finally, “fellowship” or “communion.” What does it take to build a community?

Look at your own household. Who's in charge? What is the quality of the relationships under your home roof? Can one easily see the fruits of the Holy Spirit when they step into your home: gentleness, peacefulness, joy, holiness, modesty, self-control?

A good experience of a family gathering "breathes life" into the family, whether that is through affection and song, or debating and laughing together. The Holy Spirit is that Divine Breath that keeps relationships alive.

What is true fellowship or communion? It's when we see in ourselves and thus are able to see in one another the very presence of God. And when we discover that the fellowship of God, the communion of God, the Holy Trinity of God, is with us and within us. When we reflect what we are inside, the image and likeness of God, it's easy to share in their fellowship and community.

That is what we have here at St. Martin de Porres Parish. The fellowship of God, the community of God is alive and thriving here at St. Martin's. And that is why so many of you come here week after week. We have a great product here. We just need more creative people to help "hype" the message "our there!"

In the movie, "Bruce Almighty," Bruce (Jim Carrey) asks God, "How do you make someone love you without affecting free will?" And God (Morgan Freeman) answers, "Welcome to my world, son. When you get that one figured out, let me know." Here are some starters, courtesy of St. Paul in our Second Reading: "Mend your ways. Encourage one another. Agree with one another. Live in peace."

From today's Gospel: "God so loved the world, that he gave us His only Son." I wish that sentence was not in the past tense, as something done, completed and over. I wish it could say, "God so LOVES the world, that God GIVES us the Son and their Spirit." God still loves. God still gives. God gives in His Holy Word. God gives in this Eucharist! God gives in the ministry, service and action we provide for our families, our community, our world. We can continue, and thus eventually become that giving, "Triune" action of God today. We could love the world so much, that we could give the world our very selves, so that everyone who believes in the message we bring -- about the Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit -- "might not perish but might have eternal life." (Conclude with the Glory Be...)

ADDITIONAL PAGES FOR SR. NOREEN O'CONNELL'S 70<sup>TH</sup> JUBILEE MASS at 2 PM

And now a few words about our guest of honor, Sr. Noreen O'Connell, O.P. I did ask her to provide me with some background material about her life, her ministry, her family and friends. She presented me with no less than a dozen pages of fascinating, inspiring and sometimes funny memories. They all boiled down to the three most important gifts in her life as a woman religious: faith, family and friends.

As I get closer to religious women through friendship, I discover how full their lives, their education and their experiences are. In reading Sr. Noreen's bio, she echoes similar sentiments as other religious women of her time and of her age. To enter the convent in one type of Church, to be challenged to find one's identity and one's place in a Church that was going through the transition of the Second Vatican Council, and to be so humble and open to the Holy Spirit that one's whole life journey becomes an adventure, and ministry becomes a winding road as educator, principal, parish minister, pastoral associate and advocate for applicants of the Church annulment process.

She writes, "In 1967, I was made principal of St. Gabriel High School and Superior of St. Gabriel Convent. This was a time when "the Changes" were just beginning, so I knew my position as superior was one of transition. These were traumatic times for sisters, young and old. One day I would be trying to persuade an older sister to go into a modified habit, while another day I would be telling a younger sister to stop going bike riding with the young priest of the parish. Economic challenges were against the parish and the struggling high school. Eventually, the high school closed, the older nun went into the modified habit, the younger nun married the young priest, and I survived the whole experience."

The second twenty-five years of Sr. Noreen's religious life would become a time of social and political awareness. She made three trips to El Salvador following the murder of three nuns and a lay woman. The abject poverty, the utter destruction following an earthquake and the realization that our government was supporting the killing and disappearance of people made Sr. Noreen an active protester and letter-writer against war, nuclear weapons, unjust government policies and the illegal seizure of land or water by larger business corporations.

Her brother used to say, "I'm afraid to watch the news on television for fear I'll see Noreen climbing some fence and being arrested for protesting something!"

I have been privileged to have shared Sr. Noreen's confidence over the past three years here at St. Martin de Porres, and am blessed and proud to call her, friend.

She attributes her perseverance to a regular prayer life and the support from community living. Private and communal prayer and shared experiences can never be underestimated.

Thank you, Sr. Noreen, for your saying "yes" to the Lord, for saying "yes" to your faith, and for being a mentor and an example for your family and friends.

God so loved the world that He gave us His only Son. God so loved the world, that He gave us Noreen O'Connell. We gather around this Eucharistic Table to say "thanks" for the gift of our vocations, the gift of the sacramental life in the Church, and the gift of one another. AMEN!



[Deut. 8:2-3, 14b-16a; Psalm 147; 1 Cor 10:16-17; John 6:51-58]

In 1993, the year I became a pastor for the first time, McDonald's sold its 100 billionth hamburger. No connection between the two events! Because only two digits fit on their existing signs, it was decided to permanently install the count at McDonald's as "Over 99 Billion Served." The hamburger is far from dead meat.

By comparison: How many times have you and I shared in the meal that offers us life everlasting? The cradle Catholic who receives First Eucharist at age seven or eight and continues to be faithful to the weekly liturgy stands a chance of participating in this sacred feast some 4,000 times during an average life, give or take holy days.

If you're a daily Mass-goer, make that upwards of 25,000 Very Happy Meals. Yet there's no contest to beef up our numbers.

Yet a single "full, active, and conscious" act of participation in the Eucharist brings us hope of eternal life. That sounds great for later; but eternal life actually means the fullness of life starting *here and now*. If you want it, this table is about to be set and you're invited. The Body and Blood of Christ isn't only something we "get" at every Eucharist. It's also what we *become*. We *receive* Christ. We *become* Christ. And we go forth to *bring* Christ out to a world in great need of this food.

Our society is dying of a thousand unnamed hungers; society still is heading out day after day, generation after generation, for the happy meals of wealth, power, and privilege; romance, sensation, addiction; entertainment, amusement, any kind of distraction -- hoping for satisfaction from all these. Those meals serve billions, it's true. But the reason the world keeps serving them up is because we're bound to return, with empty plates and emptier spirits. It really never satisfies us for long.

Our hungers, whether physical, emotional, social, or spiritual, can all tend to blend together. The nutritionists are right: We ought to become clear about the true nature of our hungers. How would you describe your deepest spiritual hunger?

Spiritually, what do you need the most? What spiritual food would be most satisfying? How is this nourishment available to you? Come the table...

Hungry hearts are all around us. Those mourning the loss of a loved one, in need of a job, desperate for wise counsel, unable to curb an addiction, angry and bitter.

Hungry hearts may be unforgiven or unforgiving, in poor health, worried about finances, unhappy in a relationship, unsure of their commitments, hard on themselves, afraid of the world around them, and the list goes on and on. These are the people Jesus offers to feed -- not with a temporary fix (which is usually what most of us want) -- but an everlasting source of sustenance that can be found in the change of heart that happens each time we gather to share a meal in Jesus' Holy Name.

Of course, Jesus feeds us when we approach the table of the Eucharist worthily and without sin. "Don't forget what the Lord has done for you." Those were Moses' last words to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land without him. "Don't forget what the Lord DOES for you."

And now, some thoughts on this Father's Day.

A doting father used to sing his little children to sleep. He even learned a few lullabies to lend some variety to the task. Unfortunately, he sang badly and out of tune. But this was something he could do at night to help out his wife. And he kept up this task until one night he overheard the older child say to the younger one this advice: "If you pretend you're asleep, he stops." That was the end of the lullabies.

People tell me things from the shadowy corners of their souls, and without violating confidences, I'd like to share them with you.

There is a broad spectrum of fathering. A friend's brother was recently left unexpectedly by his wife who took their young daughter with her. I'm picturing this man who would like nothing more than to see his family healed and restored; but on this Father's Day he is awakening to an empty house; there will be no dear young arms hugging him or young lips kissing his face. He is but one of many for whom *this* Father's Day is different from years past.

Here is church today, we have men: men who are faithful husbands and fathers; other men who found out years later of children they never knew who were aborted (and they wonder about them today); who have regrets in the ways they parented; men who became first-time dads and RADIATE joy like the sun.

Men who lost children or grandchildren this year and the ache is so profound words are inadequate; who walk the paths of infertility but are supposed to be “the strong one;” men who aren't providing for their families in ways that they want; who encouraged their children to be aborted; who had horrific fathers but who are doing the best that they can.

Men are here today who love fathering and walk honorably in that role; who are co-parenting and are not able to be with their children as much as they want; who are estranged from their children both relationally and physically; who lost their father this year and feel like orphans; who did not grow up with good fathers and it has impacted their view of God as Father.

There are step-fathers, fathers-in-law, adoptive fathers, biological fathers, foster fathers, spiritual fathers and mentors. David had his mighty men and we have mighty, brave men in our midst too!

On this Sunday during which we especially thank God for the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of His only begotten Son in the Most Holy Eucharist, we especially thank all fathers who reflect the Image of God to us: by protecting new life, encouraging those on their path, and living with the tension of providing both freedom and a safety net. One of the great joys in life is watching fathers delight in their children. In him (and in my own father), I see a picture of the way God delights in us and allows men to reflect that aspect of Him.

Let us pray for those fathers who have striven to balance the demands of work, marriage, and children with an honest awareness of both joy and sacrifice. Let us pray for those fathers who, by their own account, were not always there for their children, but who continue to offer those children, now grown, their love and support. Let us pray for those fathers who have been wounded by the neglect and hostility of their children.

Let us pray for those fathers, who despite divorce, have remained in their children's lives. Let us pray for those fathers whose children are adopted, and whose love and support has offered healing.

Let us pray for those fathers who, as step-fathers, freely choose the obligation of fatherhood and earned their step-children's love and respect. Let us pray for those fathers who have lost a child to death, and continue to hold their child in their heart.

Let us pray for those men who have no children, but cherish the next generation as if they were their own.

Let us pray for those men who have "fathered" us in their role as mentors and guides. Let us pray for those men who are about to become fathers; may they openly delight in their children.

And let us pray for those fathers who have died, but live on in our memory and whose love continues to guide us.

After Mass today, members of our local council of the Knights of Columbus will be handing out to each man a very special book. It is a pastoral letter, written by the Chief Shepherd of the Diocese of Phoenix, Arizona, Bishop Thomas Olmstead. It was written for each man of his diocese. It applies to each man in this diocese as well! He asks three questions: 1. What does it mean to be a *Christian man*? 2. How does a Catholic man *love*? 3. Why is fatherhood, fully understood, so crucial for every man?

There's a Spanish story of a father and son who had become estranged. The son ran away, and the father set off to find him. He searched for months to no avail. Finally, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in a Madrid newspaper. The ad read: Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father. On Saturday at noon, 800 Pacos showed up, looking for forgiveness and love from their fathers.

Never underestimate a father's love. Never underestimate your child's need for a father's love. It could provide the best meal for a lifetime. Come to the table of Life.

In our Second Reading, St. Paul harkens back to the Jewish Passover meal when he makes reference to the four cups. In the Passover meal, the cup that St. Paul refers to is the one that is to be offered and drunk by the Messiah when he comes. Yes, Jesus IS the long-awaited Messiah! And YOU and I are blessed and worthy to drink from that same blessing cup! Take and eat. Take and drink. Then go... and BECOME the Body of Christ for our hungry, hungry world! AMEN!

[Readings: Jer. 20-10-13; Psalm 69; Rom. 5:12-15; Matt. 10:26-33]

“I hear the whispering of many.” Gossip and fear are two actions that are not part of a true Christian’s character and integrity. I saw a cocktail napkin that says, “I don’t repeat gossip, so pay attention the first time.”

What is the local grapevine saying about you that troubles you? How does it affect your ability to do your job well? How do you deal with gossip at work, at school, at the game, and I dare say, here in the church parking lot or even in this very worship space? “Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed.” Do you have secrets about yourself? How do these connect with your fears? What would be likely to happen if your deepest, darkest secrets were made public?

All of us have suffered to some degree the personal agony of having someone lessen our good name, or blacken our reputation by spreading false reports about us, or by misinterpreting our actions, or by twisting the meaning of our words or by misjudging our intentions and emotions.

Few things, if any, are more precious to someone than his or her good name and good health. And yet, if we have suffered from having our good name damaged, we probably have also done our own fair share of lessening other people’s good names as well – sometimes unknowingly, sometimes intentionally, and sometimes perhaps even maliciously. Even if the information is true.

This is a form of “bearing false witness,” as forbidden by the Eighth Commandment. It may also be a kind of verbal or psychic murder that’s forbidden by the Fifth Commandment.

We kill the good name and reputation of someone with false reports, false interpretations, or simply by passing along juicy and malicious gossip. Even if the information is true, it is called slander. Libel if it is in written form. If the information is false, it is called calumny. All three are deadly – to you and to your victim. The damage done cannot be revoked, much like trying to put back into a torn pillow its feathers now blowing in the wind.

What is the motive for spreading such bad news? Is it jealousy, self-righteousness, the hurt inflicted upon us by another, our desire to appear more important than others because “I have news?” We need to ask ourselves three questions: Is it true – is it from a reliable source? Is it necessary to tell – or is better left unshared? And is it kind? -- Do I speak with charity and kindness?

E. Paul Hovey says that sin has four characteristics: "self-sufficiency instead of faith, self-will instead of submission, self-seeking instead of benevolence, self-righteousness instead of humility." Maybe that's why we sin.

So what do we do with this? Where do we go? We take consolation in the words of Jeremiah: “But the Lord is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph. In their failure they will be put to utter shame, to lasting, unforgettable confusion.” Our hope is that not only will the Lord restore our good name, if tarnished, but that the Lord will punish those who knowingly and maliciously have tried to hurt us.

Finally, Jesus tells us in the Gospel today that we shouldn't really worry about those who try to harm us, unless they also have the power to stifle the life of grace within us or can force us to deny Jesus. In short, safeguard the good name of others, and God will safeguard yours.

Jesus says, “Do not be afraid.” Fear imprisons, faith liberates; fear paralyzes, faith empowers; fear disheartens, faith encourages; fear sickens, faith heals.” “You are worth more.” Than fear.

“Fear no one,” Jesus says. Not long after, He gets more specific: Fear only the one who can destroy the soul along with the body. Soul killing may sound esoteric, but it's pretty common nowadays. At times it feels like someone has murdered the soul of America while no one was looking. We are a nation shuddering in an environmental soup of crisis. We live in fear that's stoked by every news crawl, renewed with each banner headline. And as Pope Francis points out, fear makes us cruel. The pope says fear is what drives a community to build walls, to deny the other, and to abandon the poor.

What are we so afraid of -- we who are still arguably the most powerful and secure nation on earth -- that we should surrender the best versions of ourselves? The list of what folks around us live in dread of is long. One race is afraid of what another race may do, and vice versa. The undocumented worker fears the citizen, just as the citizen blames the newcomer for his misfortunes. Native Americans fear the destruction of land and water, the desecration of Mother Earth, which they hold to be their primary stewardship.

Muslims (and those mistaken for Muslims because of their foreign-seeming dress or speech) are wary of sudden violence or exclusion from the American story altogether. Blue-collar workers are hostile to professionals who appear to denigrate their contribution or forget them altogether. Business and church both fear government, with its power to legislate away their values. In fact, anyone who doesn't fit a 19<sup>th</sup>-century definition of "belonging" on the American landscape has reason to suspect his or her safety is in doubt.

These days, nearly all of us have been in conversations that end badly, because of our deep divisions. There may be family members we don't talk to, or friends who don't come around. I've heard of arguments that escalated so badly, someone had to physically stand between two others to prevent a fight. I hear people report how tired they are. I feel the same weariness, which comes from shifting anxiety from the front burner to the back every few hours.

I'm reminded that Jesus not only says, "Fear no one," but elsewhere he declares, "Fear is useless" (Luke 8:50, 1970 NAB translation). To which He adds the important phrase: "What is needed is faith."

Will the anxieties of this present season be enough to kill our souls, to rob us of the capacity for compassion or empathy? Will fear triumph over virtues like love, kindness, generosity, and biblical hospitality to the marginalized? Will "securing ours" prevail over the mandate for the common good, which assures everyone gets what they need? If what is needed is faith, then, O Lord, increase our faith! And diminish our fears! AMEN!