

[Readings: Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41; Psalm 30; Rev. 5:11-14; John 21:1-19]

“Follow me.” These are the first words the disciples of Jesus ever heard Him address to them. They’re also the last two words of today’s Gospel. But so much has happened since the first time those words were spoken to them!

At the shore of Galilee, “follow me” must have sounded like a lark, a young man’s game, an adventure with all sorts of wonderful possible outcomes. This Teacher might become famous, and they would have been the first graduates of His school. This Preacher might wind up being a great leader, and they could assume powerful positions in His coming regime. This Healer might be a holy person in God’s plan, and who doesn’t want to be at the side of the next Moses?

But that was before miracles that rocked the senses; deep clashes with powerful authorities; terrible signs that made lips quiver and legs wobble. It was before the supper, the arrest, the trial, the cross. Before horrible days and nights spent in hiding. Before the dawn of Easter, whispers of an empty tomb, and the searing ache of hope. “Follow me” didn’t sound so innocent now. It wasn’t a game, no mere adventure. It was for keeps. And it would cost everything.

I heard Jesus Christ say to me, “Follow me” when I was praying inside Sweetest Heart of Mary Church in Detroit on the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, August 15, 1974. Jesus Christ said, “Follow me” this morning as I woke up to celebrate the 40th anniversary of my priesthood ordination on May 1, 1982. Jesus asks me daily for a devotion that translates into specific deeds of leadership, ministry, service, and care. He asks for the absolute surrender Peter thought he was giving -- before he read the fine print on the contract.

It was only half-way through the process of the parish staff planning for my 40th, that I realized it was my 40th – not my 25th or 30th, but my 40th. A significant number in the Bible. The Jews wandered for 40 years before they found the Promised Land. Probably because they were too proud to ask someone for directions! The infant Jesus was presented in the Temple 40 days after His birth.

Jesus fasted and prayed for 40 days in the desert before beginning His public ministry. After His Resurrection, Jesus walked the earth for 40 days before ascending into Heaven and sending the Holy Spirit upon Mary and the Apostles nine days later. 40 years is a long time to be a priest, and it’s a wonderful life! It has been all that I thought it would be, and much more than I thought it could never be!

I repeat the words found in today's Second Reading: "To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might forever and ever! AMEN!"

What did I think priesthood would be? The two highlights of celebrating mass with a homily that would touch hearts and touch lives. Hearing confessions and providing in the person of Jesus Christ consoling words of forgiveness and healing. I have not been disappointed. Both have been tremendous blessings.

But those forty years have also provided struggle, difficulties and pain. Not unlike what the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles and disciples had to endure in their public ministry. But like the apostles in today's First Reading, I rejoice that I have been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ, for His Church, and my ministry and service.

For strength, I turn to the three moments when I experienced the closeness of Jesus in my heart. The first was when I was 19 years old, and God called me to priesthood by turning on all the lights inside Sweetest Heart of Mary Church when I asked Him if He wanted me. The second was during my diaconal retreat in Rome, when I experienced directly, intensely and personally the passion of Jesus Christ and heard Him say to me as we sunk into the depths of death, "I am with you. I am with you." Those words are inscribed on my chalice so that as I raise it up during the Offertory and the Consecration, I remember His promise to be with me always.

The third moment was on the very day of my priesthood ordination. Before leaving Rome to be ordained in our home dioceses, my seminary classmates and I were reminded by the rector not to expect high drama on the day of our ordination, and not to expect "warm fuzzies" during the ceremony.

So what happened at the Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Detroit on May 1, 1982? During the entrance procession, the roof opened up in its center, and I heard and saw angels joining in the Opening Hymn of the Mass.

As Cardinal John Dearden began the Rite of Ordination following the Gospel, I had a vision that it went completely black in the Cathedral. A spotlight appeared on me, on Fr. Joe Esper, who was ordained with me, and on Cardinal Dearden. When I came up to him to kneel before him and receive my chalice and paten, the Cardinal prayed: "imitate what they contain."

But I heard the Lord say the literal translation of the Latin prayer: "Become these. Become these." Become bread that is broken. Become wine that is poured out

in ministry and service.” I have given my body, my life to you as a priest. For the Archdiocese and for six parishes. Many years ago, I was asked to summarize in one sentence my experience at each parish, and what each pastor taught me. Here we go! One sentence or more! I ask those here present to stand as I say the name of your parish.

I was a one-year intern and Associate Pastor at St. Mary, Our Lady of the Snows in Milford. The pastor there kindly told the people there to encourage me, even if made mistakes. He taught me to learn from my mistakes and then move on.

Then, I went to Holy Cross Parish, now Our Lady on the River Parish, in Marine City. It was a traditional parish that struggled with the changes of Vatican Two. The pastor had arrived only nine months prior to mine. There, I and the pastor were told in no uncertain terms by a small, vocal minority that we were not welcome, and to take our Vatican Two changes with us. Then I witnessed a conversion of the parish community. I was later told, that this happened because of the love which the pastor and I that had for community which healed many wounds, and created a couple new ones. The pastor there taught me to keep studying and to keep learning.

Next was Our Lady Queen of Apostles Parish in Hamtramck. The one phrase that was repeated often was, “Yes, Father, whatever you want, Father.” I liked it a lot at Queen of Apostles! It was also great to reconnect with my Polish roots, language and liturgies learned from my days at Orchard Lake St. Mary’s College. The pastor there taught me to be grateful and to express my gratitude often to the parishioners. That is why I call myself, “Your Grateful Pastor.”

Next was St. Hugo of the Hills Parish in Bloomfield Hills. There I was told, “Show us your resources, and we will accept what you say in your homilies.” It forced me to abandon tired religious and homiletic clichés and to document my homilies, and from that day forward, I write out my homilies to be consistent in my message and content. The pastor there told me to never be ashamed to ask for money. Because it is for the glory of God and for the Church, not you.

Then, I became a pastor at St. Mary Queen of Creation Parish in New Baltimore. I learned to surround myself with staff and parishioners more qualified than I in their areas of expertise as I was in mine. When I left there after twenty-one years, I told the priest coming in as their new pastor these words of advice: “Love the people, and let them teach you.” I learned so much at St. Mary’s. Thank you for the education. And thank you for your loving support.

On July 1, 2014, I arrived here as the new pastor of St. Martin de Porres. There is something unique here at St. Martin's. A true sense of community and mutual respect that goes back three generations. There were some who were suspicious of me and shared that feeling with a bank teller in Warren who handled most of the accounts of these parishioners. In time, they came around and now they support my pastorate. As Sr. Pat would say, "for the most part!"

The bank teller came around, too. When she started coming every Sunday for the 8:30 AM Mass, her customers came up to her and asked, "What are you doing here?" She proudly said, "I'm here to see my brother, your pastor!" The bank teller was my sister Kathy, who in the four years she was a member of this parish, said to me, "I have never felt as loved and accepted as I have here." Kathy died of cancer two days after the Beatification of Fr. Solanus Casey in November of 2017. My parents and all three of my siblings now are all gone.

In today's Gospel, when Jesus asks Simon Peter three times, "Do you love me?" You have to know the Greek words in order to really understand what is happening here. I don't know much Greek, so I will paraphrase in English:

"Simon, do you love Me with God's kind of love?" "Yes, indeed, most certainly, Lord. I love you with a friendship kind of love." "Simon, do you love Me with God's kind of love?" "Yes, indeed, most certainly Lord. I love you like a brother." "Simon, do you love Me with a brotherly love?"

"Lord, you know all things; you know I love you as a brother."

Listen to what happens here. Jesus comes down to Peter's level.

Jesus knows all things. He knows that Peter is not yet able to honestly say, "Lord, I am capable now of loving You as fully and as totally as You love me." So, for the time being, Jesus receives what Peter is able to give.

He accommodates Himself to Peter's current limited ability and capacity to love, as Jesus does with the same with you and me, and our limited capacities to love. Jesus stoops down to us to raise us up with Him to a higher level of love.

Peter eventually will come to love Jesus as Jesus loves Peter. He will suffer the same cruel death that Jesus Christ did. He is crucified. But in his last act of humility, Peter asks to be crucified upside down. He does not think he is worthy to be crucified in the same way as his Lord.

Let the words of this morning's Gospel inform us and unsettle us, Because Jesus is telling this to you and to me: "When you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." He said this signifying by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. And when Jesus had said this, He said to Peter, "Follow me."

Jesus asks you today: Do you love me? Do you love me with the love God has for you? Do you love me as a brother? Will YOU follow me?

At this time in my life and ministry, I am entering a new chapter with growing health concerns and the Families of Parishes process. For what has been, Lord, I say "thanks." For what will be, I say "yes."

During the Elevation of the Host at Mass, I silently pray: "For all who have asked my prayers. For all who I have promised my prayers, for all in need of my prayers, and the prayers of the whole Church, especially the people of St. Mary Queen of Creation Parish and St. Martin de Porres Parish." When I elevate the chalice with the Precious Blood, I silently pray, "How can I make a return to the Lord, for all the good He has given me? The cup of salvation I will raise, and I will call upon the name of the Lord." After I receive Holy Communion, I say in Polish: "I am with you, I remember and I stand vigilant. Jesus, I trust in you."

It's a wonderful life! And it's all yours O priest of God! ALLELUIA. AMEN!

[Readings: Acts 13:14, 43-52; Psalm 100; Rev. 7:9, 14b-17; John 10:27-30]

Happy Mother's Day! Believe it or not, Heaven is brimming with mothers -- mothers who lived and loved and have some wisdom for all of us. In honor of Mother's Day, here is a look at a few life lessons from those holy women whose glorious titles include "mom" as well as "saint." Providential that we should be doing this in light of the Roe vs. Wade "leak" which further divides this nation.

The struggles that come with the vocation of motherhood -- no matter who the mother is -- are many and real. To this even, and especially, our Blessed Mother can attest. One thinks of the sword of sorrow piercing her heart at Jesus' presentation; of the panic and fear felt while she and Joseph frantically searched for him at age 12; and, of course, of witnessing his excruciating Crucifixion. For all of its joys, motherhood brings with it its share of crosses. Such is the blessing and curse of unconditional love.

In a general audience in January 2015, Pope Francis acknowledged the many challenges that come with saying "yes" to the vocation of motherhood, and he encouraged a deeper understanding and empathy of their daily realities.

"Perhaps mothers, ready to sacrifice so much for their children and often for others as well, ought to be listened to more," he said. "We should understand more about their daily struggle to be efficient at work and attentive and affectionate in the family."

Motherhood in the 21st century brings with it its own special set of challenges. In addition to the not-so-simple task of raising kids to understand and appreciate the Faith, mothers now are faced with a culture that is antithetical to many Christian values, that is full of technology that both distracts and tempts, and that operates at a breakneck pace. At one time, even though public schools could not teach religion, they at least taught the difference between right and wrong.

"I think the world has become a scary, scary place for children, and I think the world has become a scary, scary place to raise children," Marcia Segelstein, author of "Don't Let the Culture Raise Your Kids," says.

Despite these challenges, though, mothers also serve as a vital part of the antidote -- and this is where they can find encouragement and hope.

“Without mothers,” Pope Francis wrote, “not only would there be no new faithful, but the Faith would lose a good part of its simple and profound warmth.”

As we celebrate Mother's Day this year, take heart, all you moms. There will be times of struggle. There will be times of sacrifice and pain. But you play an indispensable role in the life of your children.

“A society without mothers would be a dehumanized society, for mothers are always, even in the worst moments, witnesses of tenderness, dedication and moral strength,” Pope Francis said.

And when in doubt? Remember, others have been there.

One way mothers can combat their own isolation and keep tabs on their children is to form their own relationships with other parents, especially the parents of their children's friends. That way, they can assure their 9-year-olds that no, they are not the only child in their class without a smartphone, because they know that at least three other kids don't have one.

I like what the mother of one friend said to the mother of another friend: “I will believe half of what my kid says goes on in YOUR house, if you believe only half of what your kid says goes on in MY house!

It makes parents feel less alone to know that other parents are going through the same thing. Finding that community is important for both parents and for their children, who benefit from the positive example.

Parents also have to make sure they spend time with their children even when they think their children don't want to. Teenagers have told me often in the past that they want their parents to be with them and to talk to them. Even if it doesn't look “cool” at first glance.

Parents looking for practical ideas can turn to online sources such as CatholicMom.com, which was founded in 2000 by Lisa Hendey. She started the site, which was acquired by Holy Cross Family Ministries in 2017.

That means telling other mothers that they're doing great when they need to hear that, and calling them to step up when they need that. Sometimes what

we need to hear is, "You can do this." We need to affirm each other and build each other up." Thanks to you moms out there for hearing the call to motherhood, listening to it in your heart, and responding to it with a lifetime of loving service.

"The word of God is never silent -- though it is not always heard," St. Augustine once preached, touching upon what is really at the heart of the spiritual life. And that is, to listen to God.

It's been God's plea since the beginning, ever since he called out to the first man and woman fallen and hiding in Eden (cf. Gn 3:9). It's also the Lord's invitation. Which is how we are to hear these beautiful words of the Lord. "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand" (Jn 10:27-28).

I have the childhood memory what when large families or groups of people gather for a social event, the grown-ups sit in one area, and the kids play in another area. And when one of the kids calls out in distress, "Mom!" "Dad!" the proper parent stands up immediately and goes to the child in distress. The parent recognizes the child's voice before any of the other parent. Or how about the opposite? A parent screams out the name of their child, and that child better be running -- especially if the middle name is used!

Belonging to the true Shepherd is not merely a matter of law or custom but, rather, a matter of relationship and faith, like being the sheep of a shepherd.

To belong to Jesus the Shepherd is to hear his voice -- unashamedly obedient, unashamedly a sheep of the Lord's pasture. Such is how God welcomes believers: He calls them, and His sheep hear His voice.

In our Second Reading, we see that every true vocation has Heaven as its ultimate goal, and is ordered toward bringing other people to Heaven.

At the first meeting for marriage prep, I used to ask the couple why they want to marry each other. The usual answer was given 95 % of the time: "Because we LOVE each other!" Until one groom pointed to his fiancé and said, "Because SHE is going to get me into Heaven!"

Parents: your ultimate Catholic job description is to get your children – and each other -- into Heaven. And sometimes even for children to get their parents into Heaven.

When I was in my first years of priesthood formation, I challenged my parents to return to the practice of their Catholic Faith. Dad was struggling with alcoholism, and mom with the mental illness that comes with that. I said to them, “What would it look like to have a son who is a priest, and you are not even practicing the Catholic Faith? Spoiler Alert: CATHOLIC. GUILT. WORKS. I

In time, my dad embraced sobriety and eventually became a permanent deacon in the Church. Mom eventually became a parish secretary for twelve years in our home parish. With God's grace, they turned their lives around. I believe there is a special place in Heaven for mothers of priests, for wives of permanent deacons, and for parish secretaries. Mom was all three, and I believe that she inherited a triple crown in Heaven!

Ask yourselves: when you stand before the throne of God on Judgement Day, whom will YOU have helped get into Heaven?” Who is in Heaven now because of YOUR example and YOUR witness? Because of YOUR words and YOUR prayers? Can you imagine standing before Jesus and Him saying to you, “Well, look who's here because of YOU!” ALLELUIA and AMEN!

[Readings: Acts 14:21-27; Psalm 145; Rev. 21:1-5a; John 13:31-33a, 34-35]

We have many funerals here at St. Martin de Porres. And as part of our celebration of the life of the deceased and the renewal of our own faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we invite the family of the deceased to select the readings and funeral music for the day of the Mass of the Resurrection.

Ironically, many of the readings that we hear during these Easter Sundays are readings that appear in the Funeral Mass book of readings. Today, two of the three readings are such readings. But they apply not to a dead person but to a community facing change. They apply not to a loved one who is about to be buried, but to a church community that is about to be risen from the dead. Listen.

From today's First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles: "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God." In order for us to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ and with the Church He founded, we need to change -- we need to encounter Jesus Christ, we need to grow in His Holy Spirit, and we need to witness our faith to others.

This weekend, Paul and Barnabas are still together, which means we are en route on Paul's first of three missionary journeys. They will break up over a difference of opinion concerning fellow missionary John Mark (who gave us the Gospel of Mark) before long, but at the moment they are full of wonder at the great things God is doing everywhere they go. It is sad and a little unnerving to think of Paul and Barnabas separating.

Barnabas sponsored Paul into the Christian community when no one else was willing to touch his conversion with a 10-foot pole. As missionaries, they have proclaimed the Gospel, suffered hardships, prayed, and celebrated Mass together. Why they finally split up over a personnel issue is hard to fathom. But it does remind us that the Church has roots, both human and divine, from its inception. Disciples on their mission don't always get along with each other! I think of that as we begin Families of Parishes. We can agree to disagree! As long as we do it in charity and cooperation.

At the end of the first journey, the missionaries have good news to report. When you read the circumstances of their journey, you are surprised that their report is made with such unqualified enthusiasm.

Clearly, the response of the Gentiles to the story of salvation is so exciting to them that the rest – disputes and divisions -- pales in comparison.

Are we stuck in a rut in our individual lives, or within this generation, or marooned at this point of human history? It can feel that way at times, but only because time and the danger and the fear of the adventure of change is blocking our perspective. The command to love is the call to be made new, and it is the one force with the power to move even mountains when necessary. If we love one another, and do not settle for less, then we will discover what the first apostles knew along their journey: the endless delight of what God can do and how all the old barriers to love dissolve as we become open to the possibility.

For decades, I always thought that the hardest thing for me to do in life is change. To change my way of thinking. To change my way of living. To change my way of relating to others. But do you know what we hate more than change? You and I hate the time and energy needed during the transition!

We have to move into a new house. I don't mind that we are going to be living in a new house. It's the sorting, the packing, the recycling, and the travel back and forth several times that I hate. You, too? I have been transferred to a new job, or I am recently retired. I don't mind the new job, I am grateful to be able to afford to retire. But I hate the transition of having to learn a new routine, having to learn and remember a whole slew of new names, and, if I am retired now, having to see and to be with my spouse 24/7! You too?

Yet if, with the grace of God, we are successful in the transition, then the spirit of today's Second Reading from the Book of Revelation takes root. We will see a new heaven and a new earth. The old life is gone and a new life is embraced. Tears are wiped away. God is with us forever, making all things new!

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus says to His followers, "Come and see, come follow me." As He leaves this earth for eternity, He says, "Go and make disciples." Today, He says, "Love one another."

That is the essential job description of the authentic Christian disciple. Follow Me. Love one another. Go and make disciples. Or the summary statement of Unleash the Gospel: Change, Accompany, Grow.

This was the spirit of the Synod that took place in the Archdiocese of Detroit back in 1969, five years after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council in Rome. The Holy Spirit inspired Church leadership and their advisors to write some of the most

thoughtful, compassionate and inspiring teachings in our history as a Church. The Second Vatican Council breathed new life into the Church; Synod '69 in Detroit put flesh and bones on it.

In 2014, Archbishop Vigneron called us once again to prepare for another synod. This one he called Synod 16, calling every Catholic in every parish to move from a mindset of maintenance to a spirit of mission. To breathe new life into the tired old bones of our parishes. To “Unleash the Gospel” in the Archdiocese of Detroit. And now to continue to complete the mission with Families of Parishes.

Beginning next weekend, in anticipation of our parish 60th anniversary celebration, we will have another opportunity to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ and with the Church He founded, to encounter Jesus Christ in and through one another, to grow in His Holy Spirit, and to witness our faith to others and accompany them in their journey of faith. A parish mission brings many graces to a parish community. This year's parish mission will be more traditional. Fr. Jewel Aytona, of the Fathers of Mercy, will preach at all Masses NEXT WEEKEND. Then on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, May 23, 24 and 25, we will have Eucharistic Adoration and Confessions at 6:00 PM, Fr. Aytona's talk at 7:00 PM, and more Confessions at 8:00 PM. His mission talk topics:

Confidence in God & St. Joseph, Patron of the Church; Lukewarmness is the Devil in disguise; The Last Four Things. We stand at a crossroads between past, present, and the future into which we are invited. Jesus gives us a new and challenging commandment that leads us to full citizenship in the new and eternal Jerusalem. To get there, we have to become something new. A new door of faith opens here. Hope you can join us and cross the threshold! ALLELUIA and AMEN!

[Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47; Eph 1:17-23; Luke 24-46-53]

Some of you know that I place great importance in preparing my homilies, especially for Sundays and Holy Days. I use several resources to give you the very best. And I always begin my homily prep with this short prayer: Lord, what do YOU want to say to your people through me? So the end product is what I believe God wants to say to you... AND to me! This week, I came upon two different reflections on recent events, and I share them with you now.

Brian Burch, from Catholic Vote, offers this first reflection.

The terrible and horrific shooting in Texas is simply heartbreaking.

The evil perpetrated by a mad man defies easy explanations. Mental illness? Violent video games? Lack of security or armed school guards? No red flag laws? Guns? Pick your quick fix. Maybe it would have helped. *Maybe not.*

Despite the inevitable political gamesmanship, everyone knows something far more sinister is afoot.

As I listened to the news coverage, I was reminded of a startling comment from the late Francis Cardinal George of Chicago. He was talking about abortion, but his words are still piercing: "Too many Americans have no recognition of the fact that children continue to be killed, and we live therefore in a country **drenched in blood.**"

We live in a country drenched in blood indeed.

It's difficult to make sense of another horrific mass shooting. And it's tempting to grab for a solution. Any solution. And we pray, **Please God, just make it stop.** And then we realize that God cannot make it stop until WE do!

So what are the "root causes" of our nation being drenched in blood? I suspect you sense the answer, but have a hard time expressing it. It doesn't fit in a slogan or quick legislative fix. The obvious answer of course is sin. *Our world is awash in sin. From abortion to pornography to the destruction of marriage... everywhere we look we see attacks on religion, the family, and traditional morality.* Our biggest corporations have separated ethics and profits, fueling a consumerist and materialist culture. Our biggest cities are rife with crime, while celebrating deviancy and debauchery in schools and parades. Virtue has become sexual mores, and restraint. Religion itself is accused of being an obstacle to liberation. Without religion and spirituality, our children are depressed and lonely.

From movies and entertainment to celebrities and more, we have lost our way. Of course, none of these things on its own drives a person to intentionally shoot young children.

But I can't help but think that the combined effect of our broken culture is fueling these atrocities. It's the moral rot. And it's hard not to ask the question: *are we still good enough as a country to be free?* So what can be done?

Some important debates over various safety policies are needed. But we can't ignore the big picture, and the hard truths. We need leaders and citizens willing to recover and defend those ideas, institutions, norms, and practices that support a culture where these kinds of horrors are unthinkable.

We need more respect for innocent human life – at every stage.

We need more stable marriages, families, and neighborhoods.

We need parents supervising children and children talking to their parents. We need more religious zeal. **We need Jesus Christ.**

Father Joshua J. Whitfield is pastor of St. Rita Catholic Community in Dallas. He says this about another hotly debated and controversial subject.

A parishioner asked me once if I'd ever refuse Holy Communion to President Joe Biden or to Nancy Pelosi. Her tone made clear it was a test.

In the headlines again, I assume she just wanted to know where I stood. The problem was, though, I didn't know where I stood. To this day, I don't know where I stand or even if I should stand at all. Maybe it'd be better to find a cave somewhere. At least that's how I felt at the time.

The question unsettled me, still does. You see, to be a priest, to give the body of Christ to someone, that's a beautiful moment for me, each moment singular and unpoliced. It's hard to describe, but I find the question -- would I give or deny so-and-so Communion -- nauseating and spiritually traumatic. Call me weak and wavering if you want; I barely know what to tell you aggressive types about anything anyway. It's just that offering Communion to the People of God, for me, is something far removed from such agitated questions. What would I do if the President or Nancy Pelosi came to my parish? I don't know; only God knows. And He has not told me. However, don't count me among those up in arms over Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco prohibiting Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi from Communion. That's not me, either.

As a bishop, it's quite within his authority; it may even be his duty. Sorry Whoopi Goldberg...To accuse the archbishop of politics, that it's out of bounds for him to

exercise episcopal authority in this manner -- in relation to a politician not only actively dissenting from clear Catholic teaching but also justifying it by a plainly bizarre, mistaken read of her own professed Catholicism -- is clearly to mistake the tradition. And, I suspect, willfully.

Ever since Christ called Herod a fox, ever since He stood bloody before Pilate, preachers of the Gospel have, on occasion, necessarily opposed the political powers of the world, and not just by preaching but also by discipline. Any reader of St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians knows this.

Any reader of the tradition knows this: each Christmas, St. Augustine preached against gladiator shows; Pope Gregory VII preached against King Henry IV; Oscar Romero against the military junta of El Salvador. The bishops of Chile excommunicated agents of the secret police, and decades ago, the Archbishop of New Orleans once excommunicated a whole group of racist segregationists.

This is what real Christianity sometimes looks like: genuine Eucharistic life that is morally serious, and that includes actual discipline.

Now, we have difficulty accepting this; we can barely fathom sacramental discipline at all. But that's because we've most of us have cheapened the Eucharist into something either imaginary or meaningless.

Spiritually disciplining politicians, then, is nothing new or scandalous; rather, it's a biblical, traditional option of the Church. The question, then, is not whether a bishop can exercise apostolic authority, but whether this particular application of ecclesiastical discipline is appropriate. And here, I only say that I'm grateful I'm not a bishop, that I'll never be one; and also, that my opinion doesn't really matter in the greater schema of things. But, for what it's worth, I DO think applying Eucharistic discipline to politicians like Nancy Pelosi IS appropriate. My only wish is that we would exercise such discipline more widely, and for matters not just related to abortion. For we have many bad Catholics in public office, and they could probably benefit from similar discipline.

It is appropriate when a Catholic politician justifies something gravely contrary to the faith he or she professes.

It bears false witness in such a public manner that it confuses not only the moral witness of the Church but also the integrity of its visible communion. That's how Nancy Pelosi is different from other less public Catholics simply struggling to agree with Church teaching.

Barring someone from Communion, especially a public figure, can be an act of radical reconciliation and healing in the Church. Because it makes truth visible, clarifying that the person excluded from the Eucharist has already excluded himself or herself from the Church by his or her own actions, and that what he or she is doing is unacceptable for members of the Church. The Church, by this act of discipline, is simply making that clear, and in that sense, is practicing mercy. For it's seeking to protect such people from participating in the Eucharist unreconciled, again which St. Paul made clear was a dangerous thing to do (cf. 1 Cor 11:29-30).

So, is barring Nancy Pelosi from Holy Communion appropriate? Maybe. Maybe not. But then again, maybe it's the most honest invitation to follow Jesus she's ever received from the Church. Maybe this is the first time in a long time the Catholic Church has ever been honest with her. Again, I don't know. As I said, I'm glad I'm not a bishop. But maybe we should want to see more politicians called to accountability. Maybe we should desire such discipline for ourselves, or at least that we all take the moral demands of Catholicism a bit more seriously. Which might be just what the world needs.

This is ME speaking now. The real question for each one of us today is, is there similar evidence in our own lives, in our own practice, in our own beliefs, that would deny or keep US from receiving Holy Communion? But because we are relatively ordinary and unknown folks, nobody is scandalized by our belief system, attitudes or actions. Our "secrets, skeletons and sins." If others knew about it, if Church officials knew about it, what is in our own personal lives, which would deny or keep you and me from receiving Holy Communion?

On this feast of the Ascension, may you and I be in a constant process of being "carried up" into Heaven by the Father Who truly loves us, by the Son Who teaches us the truth, and by the Holy Spirit, Who guides us through the rocky roads of life and faith, of charity and fidelity. From earth to Heaven. Where He has gone, we hope to follow.
AMEN! ALLELUIA!

[Readings: Isaiah 9:1-6; Psalm 85; Colossians 3:12-15; Matt 5:38-48]

On this Memorial Day, how do we reconcile the reality and the genuine need for military service with the response of nonviolence? The Catholic Caucus of Southeast Michigan, a Catholic lobby group, says that both can be reconciled.

On the one hand, doesn't Jesus say, "Put away the sword" on the night He is betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane on Holy Thursday?

The words and the life of the nonviolent Jesus are considered by many to be unrealistic. The world relies heavily on weapons; individuals arm themselves; and violence spirals upward to where it may destroy us. There is an alternative. One that can work hand in hand with our need to be prepared and to defend ourselves militarily. Military service and nonviolence are compatible. It's not a case of "either/or" but of "both/and."

We may be ignorant of the successes of nonviolence. Nonviolent resistance has played a much more significant role than is generally acknowledged by historians. Gandhi's campaign against British colonial rule; Martin Luther King's civil rights struggle; the overthrow of the dictator Marcos in the Philippines; the displacing of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and the Resistance that even worked against the Nazis in Norway and Berlin are just a few examples. Yes, both Gandhi and King were assassinated, as well as countless unnamed others. So they join the ranks of our beloved martyrs.

We who dream of peace, who struggle for justice, and who want to follow the way of Jesus, should take on this challenge to pursue the possibilities of nonviolence as FIRST alternatives, and violence as a LAST alternative both for our world and for our own lives. We realize also that the patriot's blood is the seed of freedom's tree. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. Both share something in common. Some would sacrifice America's ideals to protect America. Some would deny Jesus Christ and the Church He founded to save their lives, but end up losing their souls. Today we honor those who did not. We honor those who died faithful to their God, to their Church and to their Country.

The dead soldier's silence sings our national anthem. Uncle Sam looking over the headstones at Arlington National Cemetery and weeping: too many nephews. Too many nieces. We could add: too many husbands and wives, too many sons and daughters, too many sisters and brothers; too many friends and comrades and co-workers; too many students and teachers.

We come here to remember them, to praise them and to return them to the Lord. Our lives of freedom and peace have been brought to us by a soldier. Every day is Memorial Day wherever our military is stationed. It takes a family to defend a nation.

Veterans coming home especially need our attention and our prayers. They make up a significant percentage of our homeless citizens. So many left their jobs to defend their country and return to a country that has no jobs for them. They came back with physical and emotional wounds that need healing and find that they are without medical insurance. Some have even taken their own life, saying, "I've gone from the hell of war to the hell of indifference." Did you know that every day in this country 22 of our veterans take their own lives? 22 a day. What can we do for our veterans? Aren't these the people Isaiah describes in our First Reading? They are "walking in darkness and still living in the land of deep darkness of depression and despair. We pray that one day they may see a great light, and have light dawn in their darkness.

This reading is always read on Christmas Eve at the Mass at Night, and refers to the birth of Jesus Christ in time and in human flesh. He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Those who, as Isaiah describes, are "crushed and dejected," who will "heal them and lead them and give them new life?" Our response must be that described by St. Paul to the Colossians in today's Second Reading: we are to seek them out, receive them, direct them to the proper service agencies and minister to them, with "heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

Sometimes, all we can do and all that we need to do is listen. Give them permission to tell their story. Secondly, we pray. For those who afflicted with PTSD, alcoholism, drug addiction, loss of limb. Those who cannot leave the war

behind. Those who wake up in the middle of the night screaming and ready to fight. Those who cannot forgive themselves for having to sacrifice someone else's life for the cause. Those who saw their comrades die while they lived.

And then we hear the most unsettling and controversial words of Jesus in today's Gospel: "Love your enemies. Do good to those who harm you."

Is this possible?

There is a story that goes that during the end of World War II, a German unit of infantrymen was ordered to kill as many prisoners in the Auschwitz concentration camp as they could before the Allied troops entered the camp. As the soldiers walked past the human carnage left in the dust, one young German soldier noticed that one of the bodies, that of a young boy, was still moving. Their eyes met. The soldier nodded and continued marching. The boy escaped.

Fast forward thirty years. The boy eventually makes his way to the United States and lives a productive and faith-filled life. He became a general practitioner. One of his patients is a very sickly man, who himself had left Germany after World War II and came to America. With his medical knowledge and the miracle of healing, the old man got better over the weeks. At their last appointment, the doctor said, "You don't remember me, do you? We saw each other at the Auschwitz concentration camp. You let me live. I saw the name on your name patch. Thank you for not killing me." Love your enemies. Let us pray:

God of power and mercy, you destroy war and put down earthly pride. Banish violence from our midst and wipe away our tears, that we may all deserve to be called your sons and daughters. Keep in your mercy those men and women who have died in the cause of freedom and bring them safely into your kingdom of justice and peace. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN!