

[Readings: Isaiah 66:10-14c; Psalm 66; Gal 6:14-18; Luke 10:1-12, 17-20]

I love seeing babies at church. Thank you to the parents who bring them to worship with us. I know it takes a lot of work getting ready at home to come to church. And a lot of work watching over the baby during Mass. How can you not pay attention to a newborn -- yawning, scrunching her little nose up, or trying to jam a fist into his mouth? And when they're a bit older it's fun to watch them look around from their perch in Mom or Dad's arms, taking in the lights and colors and strange people, making noise in our acoustically perfect space, their eyes wide with curiosity. My favorites are the ones who are totally collapsed onto their parent's shoulder so we get to see their sweet sleeping face so full of contentment. As the parents walk their children around the back of church or up to Communion or sway to the music while still in the pews, the child's every need is met and the little one is content and satisfied and living in the now.

In fact, the First Reading this week from Isaiah proclaims a promise from God that those who are faithful will be comforted, fed, carried in God's arms, and filled with joy so that we can collapse, like contented newborns, into God's care.

Yes, I love watching babies at church, and after hearing Isaiah describe God's promises, I now know that it's a flesh-and-blood meditation on God's total love for each and every person -- even you and me.

At the other end of the spectrum, time has snuck up on us. With each passing year, I hear older men and women admitting that they are no longer able to carry the load of big family dinners. Older parents are asking for help more and more with holidays and other celebrations. The next generation of sons and daughters steps in. Old recipes are shared. Grandma and Grandpa step back in letting their adult sons and daughters handle it all, never looking over their shoulder or correcting them. It was now their turn. They look on with love and gratitude. When asked how it feels to pass the torch on to another new generation, they eagerly reply: "Blessed. How blessed I am by God." No matter what pain we encounter in life, we are blessed.

We are the children of God. It is the same blessing that God gave the chosen people, his family, in today's scriptures that is given to us.

As the head of your spiritual family, I am responsible for encouraging you to be active family members, evangelizers and good stewards of our resources. Last Monday, we began a new fiscal year, July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020. If you look at the Support Report for the last fiscal year in next week's bulletin, you will see that we were \$7,700 short in our Sunday collection budget. I am asking you this new fiscal year to consider increasing your weekly support by \$3.00, starting with this month. For four weeks, put an extra \$3.00 in your church support envelope each week, so that we can begin our new year in the black. I thank you for your sacrifice.

In his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel"), Pope Francis describes one of the temptations of Christians today. Rather than experience the joy of the Risen Christ, the gift of divine love that dwells among the human family, we may focus exclusively on the difficulties. We become those perpetually stuck in Lent, with sour faces and sad demeanors. We're sorrowful sourpusses who emphasize the bitterness of life, of our nation, of our Church. Since Pope Francis wrote this encyclical in Spanish, I am still waiting for the official Latin translation to come out, so I can see how they translate "sourpuss."

We, of course, are right to mourn over such moments. To be sorrowful that so many politicians, clerics, business leaders and folks in the Church have failed. We can and should do better.

But we also must acknowledge the Good News that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. That this Church -- sometimes really bad at living out the Gospel -- also has transfigured creation. This is why it's good for us in America to hear from Our Lord about the successes of evangelization and the proclamation of the Gospel to the ends of the world. Our Lord sends his disciples out on a perilous journey (cf. Lk 10). They're sent with little. As I am packing for my summer vacation, the words, "Take no money bag, no sack, no sandals sounds pretty appealing to me to "travel light!"

They expect little success, only trouble. But the 72 disciples come back proclaiming the Good News of joy, success and divine glory. Through the name of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit given by the Father, the demons have given up their project. Divine love has won.

Even in the midst of scandal and sin, we should remain hopeful in this fact. God does not abandon us. God never forgot Jerusalem, even when she sinned over and over, but always promised to call her back, to enter again and again into union with her. God hoped in Israel. God hopes in the Church. God hopes in us.

Of course, Jesus reminds us that the success of evangelization is not that the demons respond to us! The success of evangelization is that our names are inscribed in heaven. We return to the original vocation that God intended for us: to become those made for praise. We become ciphers of love unto the end.

Thus the Church — even in the midst of our scandal caused by clerical malfeasance — needs to rejoice. We need to rejoice that so many religious women and men have brought the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all the ends of the earth. They have preached the Good News of justice and divine friendship to the poorest of the poor. They have lived with the poor, transforming their lives. We need to rejoice that there are so many baptized, lay Catholics who have raised holy families. They have preached the Gospel in their neighborhoods, in their parishes, in their workplaces. They have created a culture where divine love has become incarnate in space and time.

We need to rejoice that there remain holy priests, holy bishops, holy deacons who have lived out their vocation of love in hidden ways. We need to rejoice, not because the Church is remarkable or worthy of such praise. Rather, we need to rejoice because such success is, in fact, evidence that God is the source of power -- not us. Definitely not us.

What a merciful God to include us in this work of evangelization. AMEN!