

[Readings: Acts 9:26-31; Psalm 22; 1 John 3:18-24; John 15:1-8]

Have you ever heard the expression, “Make yourself at home?” That means that you are a guest in someone’s home, and they want you to feel as if it is your home. There is an Italian expression that says you should only visit for no longer than three days: “Ospidi sono come pesce, dopo tre giorni, puta!” Guests are like fish, after three days you have to throw them out!

There is an important word in two of our three Readings this morning: “remain.” In the original Greek, the word means to dwell, or to indwell, to make a home inside. That’s what Jesus wants to do with each one of us. He wants to make Himself at home within our hearts. How do we do this? He says, by keeping His commandments. By loving in deed as well as words.

When have you forgiven someone once hostile to you? When have you ever been like Barnabas, welcoming back to the community those once estranged from it?

Paul proved his repentance through action. Do you do the same and encourage the same in others? Do you love by your actions as well as your words?

In what ways do you maintain your connection to the true vine of Jesus? How does this relationship bear fruit in your life? How is God glorified in you?

Today’s Gospel talks about vines and branches. Most of us are city people, and we don’t know much about this kind of work. But those who do work in vineyards know two things: you have to keep the vines off the ground, and you have to prune or trim the branches to keep them healthy and to produce much fruit. If you leave a grape vine on the ground, each of the individual branches will try to take root in the ground. Each branch competes for the soil, the nutrients and the water, and they don’t survive. By themselves, whatever grapes are produced are small, tiny and bitter. You cannot eat them and you cannot use them to make wine.

The Italians were the first to build what we call trellises. These are wooden frames, usually in the shape of arches that you would wrap the vines

around to keep them off the ground and expose them to the sunlight. Their branches would produce big, juicy grapes. But the branches need to be trimmed to bring forth fruit, and, most importantly, the branches need to be connected to the vine in order to receive food, nutrients and water. If the branches are cut off from the vine, the branches die.

If we are connected with the Lord, the St. John says, "Ask whatever you want, and it will be given to you." "OK Lord, I want to win the \$300 Million Lotto, to drive a Mercedes, and to live in a million dollar home!" Will Jesus give this to me because I asked for it? No! Because there is a very important condition: We need to be doing God's will, and not ours. If everything we think, everything we say and everything we do is according to God's will, then whatever we ask God we will receive because we are doing what GOD wants us to do, NOT what WE want to do! This is how we stay connected with Jesus. The best prayer ever is this: "Not my will but THY will be done! Whatever happens, Lord, be with me!"

The month of May is one of two months dedicated to Mary, the Mother of God. We honor her this weekend with the traditional May Crowning. We welcome the Active Christian Women's Club who are here for their Corporate Communion, and we welcome any members of the Pope Pius X Council of the Knights of Columbus who also are in attendance.

On May 1st, we celebrate the Feast of Saint Joseph the Worker. Personally, I celebrate the anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood. 39 years this year, and looking forward, God willing, to my ruby, 40th, anniversary next year. Established in 1955 by Pope Pius XII, this special feast day gives all who labor a protector and an example to follow. Falling on the first day of the month dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, "May Day" is meant to highlight the dignity of labor and bring a spiritual dimension to all of our work, so that our labors -- even the most menial -- are done for the praise and glory of God.

Working with patience and joy to provide for his Holy Family, Saint Joseph offers for us an example of the demeanor and spirit with which we, too, should complete our work; be it that of our employment or our everyday household chores.

Our work is meant to be a participation in the creative work of God; we are meant to be productive. We also do well to remember that great respect and honor need be given to the value and sacrifice made in the work of caring for the family. In this Year of St. Joseph, let us pray through the Intercession of Saint Joseph, the silent Saint, who watches over the Church and gives dignity to our human labors. I close, dedicating the rest of my priestly years, with this prayer, composed by Pope St. Pius X, patron of our local Knights of Columbus Council:

O Glorious Saint Joseph, model of all those who are devoted to labor, obtain for me the grace to work in a spirit of penance for the expiation of my many sins;

to work conscientiously, putting the call of duty above my natural inclinations;

to work with thankfulness and joy, considering it an honor to employ and develop by means of labor the gifts received from God;

to work with order, peace, moderation, and patience, never shrinking from weariness and trials;

to work above all with purity of intention and detachment from self, keeping unceasingly before my eyes death and the account that I must give of time lost, talents unused, good omitted, and vain complacency in success, so fatal to the work of God.

All for Jesus, all through Mary, all after thy example, O Patriarch, Saint Joseph. Such shall be my watch-word in life and in death. AMEN. ALLELUIA!

[Readings: Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48; Ps. 98; 1 John 4:7-10; John 15:9-17]

Happy Mothers Day! It is an appropriate day to consider the ultimate possibilities of love. Through the centuries, women take the risk of love to bring children into the world. Often in terrible circumstances, under difficult, lonely, economically strained conditions. Women became mothers at the risk of their lives in times past and still in many parts of the world where medical care is sketchy or non-existent. And once the children are born, good mothers continue to put the welfare of their children above their own need for rest, for recreation, for all they might have had without the burden of care for dependent lives.

Whether they stay at home with their children or must work outside to provide their care, mothers remain the primary model of constancy in our world. Even mothers who neglect or deny their children prove the model because we expect them to behave otherwise.

A mother's love is irreplaceable. If we got it from our mothers it needs no explanation; if we didn't get it, we may spend our whole lives looking for it or suffering its lack. Father-love, of course, can be equally heroic and is certainly as indispensable, if in distinct ways. Psychologists have only begun to explore how we need our parents. A father and a mother. The happy adult will originally have had, or restored for themselves through mentors, the necessary sources of love and constancy we seem to require at the root of who we are.

And maybe this isn't so strange, since God is love, and we are God's children. Love is literally at the root of our identity. We seem to know this and need it as much as air and food and shelter. We're made from love, and for happiness, according to the most basic catechisms. Unless and until we discover this love for ourselves, we won't really be happy. Like St. Augustine said, we're restless until we rest in ultimate love: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." So Jesus tells us: "Remain in me, as I remain in my Father."

How do we find our way to this kind of love, especially if we didn't experience it originally or lost it along the way?

From the words of St. Peter in our First Reading from Acts of the Apostles: “In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather... whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.” Now remember here what “fear” means. It doesn’t mean, “Wait until your father comes home!” Or, even worse, “Wait until I tell your mother what you did!” It means reverent respect and obedience.

Do mothers show partiality to their children? Moms? (Wait for an answer). You probably cannot answer that question right now because your kids are with you. But, we know. I know I was my Mom’s favorite and my sister Kathy was my Dad’s favorite. I remember my mom saying point blank, “I love all my children equally.” And then privately, she would tell each one of us, “You know YOU’RE my favorite!”

St. John in today’s Second Reading from his first letter tells us to “love one another, because love is of God.” I don’t think he is speaking about a conditional love or a masked hate.

When the verbal sparring matches between the four of us siblings, two boys and two girls, got out of hand, mom would make us get a chair and sit across from each other, almost touching noses. Then we had to look each other in the eye and keep saying, “I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you...” Then our anger was diffused and we would laugh, hug, and move on.

Today’s Gospel repeats the challenge of remaining in God’s love by following God’s commandments. How many teens like to be told by their parents, “as long as you’re living under this roof, you will obey my rules?” If we fail to obey the house rules, we might end up in the street; if we fail to obey God’s rules, we might end up in Hell. It’s as simple as that.

Jesus points us to the one unshakeable command of his Kingdom: Love one another as I love you. It’s no good to lament that we didn’t get the love we needed or don’t get it now, or if we’re unwilling to give it to those who need it from us.

Jesus doesn’t *invite* us to love each other. He doesn’t *recommend* that we do. He doesn’t *think* it’s a good idea. He *commands* it. Love is an imperative, because the fulfillment of life is impossible without it.

Mother's Day is often a time of celebration, appreciation, and joy. But for others, it's one of the most difficult days of the year. This is especially true for women facing infertility or those who have recently experienced the loss of a mother, a child, or other loved one. How can this be a Happy Mother's Day?

First, embrace your emotions. Give yourself permission to grieve. It's OK to feel sad and even cry -- it's okay to be emotional on Mother's Day. It's also helpful to realize that emotions are not good or bad. They are just messengers that tell us about what's going on inside of us. They are meant as stops along life's journey rather than destinations. If you continually feel sad over a lengthy period of time or it seems as if there is no hope at all, then consider getting help from a professional.

Second, seek support. Support groups can be a great source of comfort.

Third, do something special. The kind of action you take depends on your personality and the nature of your loss. For example, if you lost your mother then you might write her a letter. After Mom's death, we discovered letters she had written to each of her children. If you lost an unborn child, you might donate to a crisis pregnancy center in his or her honor. You and your spouse might look at photos of the sister you lost to cancer or visit a place where you used to go together.

Finally, hold on to hope. God sees each one of us. He knows how many hairs are on our heads and how many cares are in our hearts. Whatever you're going through this Mother's Day, you're not facing it alone. May God surround you with love, fill you with hope, and give you strength for each moment -- especially this Mother's Day. May you be wrapped in Mary's mantle of love and know that you are loved by her. By us. By God Himself. AMEN! ALLELUIA!

[Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47; Ephesians 4:1-13 Mark 16:15-20]

This is truly a time of transition. In the Archdiocese of Detroit, Wave One of the Families of Parishes is wrapping up, and Wave Two will begin next year, an adventure with three other parishes. This is the season for other transitional experiences to happen: graduation on the elementary, high school and college levels are taking place, with celebration and sharing memories of years gone by. It is also the season for weddings and priesthood ordinations, and First Communion and Confirmations.

Today's Feast of the Ascension is very much like that. Traditionally, we are told that forty days lapsed between the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and His return to the Father in glory. That's why Ascension was celebrated on a Thursday. But for the convenience of working Catholics and the chance to give this feast day the prominence it deserves, it has been moved in most dioceses of our country from Thursday to the Seventh Sunday of Easter.

And what a time of transition this has been for the disciples of Jesus! He is taken up into Heaven. His successor, St. Peter, the First Pope, is a shadow of their former leader. So tentative are the Apostles, so frightened still, that they are coached by Jesus to "stay in Jerusalem" and remain there for nine days until the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Consoler, the Helper, will come to them. This is the first recorded "novena" or 9-day prayer in the Catholic Church!

We have about seventy funerals a year here at St. Martin de Porres. Many of the folks we have buried were founding members and very generous stewards of this parish, or their relatives. There is a different spirit when a loved one dies, one that might make us uncomfortable. Because now we are without the comfort of them being with us. After the passing of St. Pope John Paul II, his personal secretary, now Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, was asked, "How are we going to live without him? How is the Church going to survive without him?" Immediately, he said: "Before his death he was greatly limited by the confines of his body and his health. Now he can go anywhere around the world and help us

a thousand times more effectively than he did in his body!" So can Jesus Christ!

The Good News of the Gospel is that the story doesn't end with Jesus returning to Heaven. That's Part II of a three-part story. You and I make up Part III. "All that Jesus did and taught" now becomes all that you and I must do and teach in order for the Kingdom of God to come to earth, and to remain here until Jesus returns for His Great Curtain Call at the end of time.

What holds us back? Negativity? Fear? Just as Jesus experienced opposition, resistance, misunderstanding and rejection, Jesus promises to continually accompany anyone who responds in faith, trust and abandonment. Jesus may have left us in time and space, but He never leaves our human experience. He lives and works with us here, through the promised Holy Spirit, Whose presence and gift among us we will celebrate next weekend.

As I mentioned, Jesus did not ascend immediately; He spent a highly symbolic 40 days -- reminiscent of his 40 days in the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry -- speaking to the apostles "about the kingdom of God." We can assume He wasn't telling them anything about the Kingdom He hadn't already told them during His earthly life, but it's intriguing to wonder what He said. Perhaps the difference was not in the message but in the way the disciples heard it. Now there was no more wondering. All the promises had been fulfilled, the doubts erased. That must have affected their perspective.

Go back and look at the scripture readings for Mass for the Sundays of Lent. With a "post-Resurrection" point of view, what do you hear that is new?

In the meantime, we still call upon Him. We still accept the mission to go out to the entire world and proclaim the Good News. We pray in the words of St. Paul: May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, give us a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in the full and lasting knowledge of Him. May we live in a manner worthy of the call we have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit. We are called to accept the mission and to fuel the mission.

One way we share in that mission is through our annual participation in the Catholic Services Appeal. Our annual Catholic Services Appeal is underway! I am SO proud that our St. Martin de Porres parishioners come through every year to meet the financial challenge of our parish CSA target, which is set and given to us by the Archbishop and his CSA Committee. When we embrace the CSA for carrying out the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy, we witness Christ, and in turn, we open doors so others may also develop a deeper relationship with Him. We also extend our personal involvement in our local Church beyond our home parishes -- works no one individual or parish could possibly do alone.

Our parish target last year was \$90,708 with a reduction of 15% because of the pandemic, making it \$77,101.00. We went over our 2020 target by \$2000.00, thanks to your continued stewardship and generosity. Our 2021 parish target is \$87,680 -- roughly a \$10,500 increase from last year.

If you can, I am asking everyone to help make up the difference in our CSA parish target increase by prayerfully considering a sacrifice of \$50 or \$100 a month -- less than the cost of a visit to the online casino or to the beauty parlor -- to fund our evangelization and outreach to the uninstructed and to those in material or spiritual need. That would be a pledge of \$500 or \$1000 for this year's CSA. We have already received 3 pledges for \$1000 and 5 for \$500.

As a public statement of your commitment to your parish and to your Archdiocese, after our silent pause following this homily, I invite you to stand up and pledge your support. Once again, the Archdiocese of Detroit is mailing out all the information and donor cards, and handling all of the bookkeeping through another agency. Thank you in advance for your participation by prayer and for your financial sacrifice! The Holy Spirit fuels our gifts... your CSA sacrifice fuels the mission! Help me raise the curtain to Act III of the Greatest Story Ever Told!

AMEN! ALLELUIA!

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

When was the last time you got really excited about something? Is there something we yearn to do so much that, when it comes time to do it, we are beside ourselves with joy?

For too many of us, those are hard questions to answer, because the answers may be flat and disappointing. Lots of us might reply that we don't have time to experience those sensations because there are always obligations blocking our view of possibility and hope. Our relationships may be too complicated, tricky, risky, to feel simple pleasure at the sight of those we love.

Of all the places we might look for the vaguest hint of excitement, however, church is probably close to last on too many lists. I hope, for your sake, that our parish is one of the more engaging and vital communities you're involved with, that it's a real source of inspiration and life. I don't suppose there are many people who shout, "Oh Boy! We're going to church!" But in the event that it might not be, then let's broaden the meaning of "church" for a minute. Consider the body of believers over 20 centuries who have been living and dying for the Christian Faith. Imagine the experience of the little group who first followed Jesus around for three years, heard Him teach, witnessed His miracles, watched Him die, stood at the empty tomb, saw Him and ate with Him again, and viewed His departure. Do you suppose they were excited?

They ran back to a room where they prayed until the Spirit of God filled their house and their minds and hearts until they couldn't contain the experience. So they spilled into the streets and spoke of it to everyone, in every language, with every ounce of their zeal. They were so wildly excited that people thought they were drunk at 9 o'clock in the morning, coming in from an all-nighter someplace, veterans of a pretty long party. That kind of exuberance didn't usually happen or come from a synagogue!

But the energy of this thrilling time didn't end on Pentecost. Paul talks about the driving force of that whole first generation of believers who claimed Jesus as Lord. Their experience was so powerful, it transcended everything else

about their lives. It didn't matter anymore if they were Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free, men or women -- no matter who they were or what they did, horrible sinner or near-saint, this Good News, this Gospel put them in the same relationship to God. The Holy Spirit, as we hear in our Second Reading, gives us different forms of service and different workings, many parts of one body. All of us are given to drink of the same Spirit. Alleluia!

This was an unthinkable concept back then, and to many it's unthinkable now. For the lowest, poorest, and rottenest folk, this was the best news they'd ever heard. For those who had been doing quite well and were pleased with their spiritual progress so far, this news was somewhat more jarring, even disappointing.

The risen Jesus greets the gathered disciples with words of peace. How do I bring peace to the people I encounter and serve?

The Spirit testifies to the truth and empowers Christians to confess their faith in Jesus. In what ways do I witness to the mighty acts of God in my life?

What are the gifts and forms of service the Spirit has given me? How do I cultivate and use them? Do I encourage others to know and put their gifts to work?

What if people started believing this wholesale and tried to live as if it were true? This is what we believe and do at St. Martin de Porres Parish! I have said this often: if we allowed the Holy Spirit to impact the world the way the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the world, what a different world this would be!

By the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, here is what we have accomplished together at St. Martin de Porres Parish since Pentecost Sunday of last year, in addition to our regular ministries, services and liturgical celebrations:

On June 3, 2017, four years ago, Archbishop Allen Vigneron released his pastoral letter, or "letter from the pastor" to all parishes in the Archdiocese of Detroit: "Unleash the Gospel."

From that pastoral letter came, "Families of Parishes" – a process of discernment to group parishes together with a new structure and a new impetus to move each parish "from maintenance to mission."

In January of 2022, our parish, along with St. Michael Parish, St. Ephrem Parish, and St. Blasé Parish, all in Sterling Heights, will begin working together the logistics of becoming a Family of Parishes, to better serve our needs and to better reach out in the task of evangelization, to “renew the face of the earth” with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The pastors of these four parishes will be meeting soon to discuss our shared vision and hopes for this process.

When I first heard the title of this new process, I recalled an episode of the sit-com *Roseanne*, when Becky and Mark eloped and then came back to visit the Conner family. In a private moment between Roseanne and Mark, Roseanne says, “You’re family now... and you see how we treat each other in this family!”

The COVID-19 pandemic certainly has had an impact in our parish, our Archdiocese, our state, our nation, the Universal Church and the whole world. The most dramatic impact has been the drop in church attendance since the public Mass ban in March of last year. The majority of parishioners coming to church are over 65, although I see many younger families, younger couples, teens and children joining us, and I thank you for that. It’s good to see children and babies at Mass again! Thank you, thank you, thank you! But half of our regular parishioners still choose to quarantine because of compromised health situations, declining health and anxiety over being in a large crowd. God bless them!

Because of this situation, last year, our parish income fell 50%, and drastic cuts had to be made in our parish budget and staff salaries. We lost five key staff members who chose to retire at this time in their life journey.

Thanks be to God, those positions have been filled with dedicated and qualified people. Your financial support has helped keep us “in the black,” and your material support allows us to continue to help people in need, and to keep our Faith Formation program alive and well.

It is no secret that the demographics of the parishes in Warren are changing. Our older parishioners are becoming more infirmed. For the 70 to 90 members who die each year, there are few replacements. With the loss of membership comes a loss of income, which impacts our budget.

We continue to make and exceed our annual CSA parish target, thanks to you. This week's appeal is only two weeks running, and we are already at 25% of this year's parish target. Hoo-ray for YOU!

If you have not received your CSA information and pledge card, please phone the Archdiocese of Detroit and inform them, as they are doing the mailings. Please continue to offer your prayers and your financial sacrifice to keep us going, as we continue to move from "maintenance to mission!"

The pandemic has reduced our Christian Service ministries and service by 80%. Large public gatherings, small group activities, and visiting homes and nursing homes have been forbidden, but as COVID numbers decline and more people take the vaccine, and as more restrictions are lifted, we hope to restart these activities. We continue our efforts with the Holiday Giving Program and collecting food for the St. Veronica Food Pantry in Eastpointe. We have created a new Christian Service outreach with welfare phone calls to our elderly and homebound parishioners. The Active Christian Women's Club has temporarily postponed all their activities during the pandemic, but they have created a bi-monthly newsletter to keep members informed and connected.

Our number of those in liturgical ministries continues to decline. We need more ushers, altar servers, lectors, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and choir members. We continue to provide a welcoming spirit of hospitality, quality music, and I try my best to give you a quality homily every week.

In the area of Christian Faith Formation and Religious education, our children are being brought into a closer relationship with Jesus. Our catechists show enthusiasm and their love of Christ. Each of them inspire me in my faith.

Our classroom sessions have been remote, via ZOOM, but we hope to resume in-person classes, Bible Study and retreats for catechists, and for students and parents preparing for First Eucharist and Confirmation, beginning in the fall. We are looking for greater opportunities to reach out to our Faith Formation parents to make the practice of the Faith a higher priority in their lives, as the first and best teachers of faith for their children. This may improve our

church attendance. We are still collecting empty pop bottles and cans, and we are still collecting paper for recycling.

In his book, "I Heard God Laugh," which I read last week when I was on my retreat, Matthew Kelly reminds us about two things: that we live in hope that things will get better, and that we are not the victims of our circumstances. It's time for each one of us in this church to be "on fire" with the Holy Spirit!

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 be "on fire" and to "Unleash the Gospel" in our parish, in our Archdiocese and in the world!

On the morning of June 11, 1805, the city of Detroit caught fire, and nearly everything was destroyed. The population of Detroit at the time was about 600 people. Today, the legacy of the Great Fire of 1805 is evident in the flag of the City of Detroit. Two women appear in the center – one who weeps over the town's destruction and the other who looks ahead to the stronger, brighter city that will replace it. The Latin motto on the flag, reportedly stated by Father Gabriel Richard, reads: "Speramus meliora; resurget cineribus," which means "We hope for better things; it will arise from the ashes."

"We hope for better things." Hope is what keeps us alive and faithful. It is the first step in any awakening or renewal. Hope carried Jesus' disciples through the dark days after His death. Then, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they and all of us Disciples of Christ were given the unending hope that it is possible to know the truth. And this truth will set us free from whatever imprisons us.

I close my remarks with a Prayer to the Holy Spirit:

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

And you shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise
and ever enjoy His consolations, through Christ Our Lord, Amen. Alleluia!

[Readings: Deut. 4:32-34, 39-40; Psalm 33; Romans 8:14-17; Matt. 28:16-20]

Do you have a favorite Bible verse or Bible story?

Certain verses in scripture make our hearts leap up and stand at attention, though perhaps for different reasons. Sometimes we are attracted to the excitement in the exclamations: "Let there be light!" "A child is born for us!" "He is risen; he is not here!" Other lines thrill us with their mystery: "I shall let my beauty pass before you, but my face you cannot see." "His face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light." Sometimes it's the questions that move us, because they are also our questions: "Lord, will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty?" "How long, Lord, will you hide your face from me?" "Lord, to whom can we go?" But often it's the humanity of the statements in a holy text that astonish us with their bald honesty: "Cursed be the day that I was born!" Or the ache in the brevity: "And Jesus wept."

One verse that always gets my attention is this funny sentence near the end of Matthew's gospel that we hear today: "When they all saw Jesus, they worshiped, but they doubted." It's awkward, and comical in its contradictions. But it offers a most comforting and endearing image of what discipleship looks like under even the best possible conditions. In the midst of an act of worship, the 11 closest friends Jesus ever had doubted him. And this is after three years of teaching, healing, miracles, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. Christ the Lord is standing right in front of them, right before their eyes. And they worship Him. And they doubt. Such is the richness of our humanity!

Shouldn't the 11 remaining apostles be levitating with Easter certainty? Shouldn't they be standing on the mountaintop with Jesus halfway to transfiguration themselves in the presence of His risen glory?

Evidently faith doesn't work that way. The disciples reserve a corner of doubt in the dynamic exercising of their faith. They have rushed to Galilee to meet Jesus, even as they doubt the likelihood of such an encounter. They bow reverently, all the while disbelieving their own experience.

And we know what this is. We call it "hoping against hope." We want what cannot be. We acknowledge the futility of our longing and continue to want it. In a sense, this is the only real definition of faith, to long for what cannot logically be. If something is obviously and inevitably coming our way, it doesn't take faith to wait for it, just patience.

Faith is reaching for the improbable and then graduating to the impossible. If resurrection from the dead and virgin birth and miraculous healing were rationally comprehensible events, we wouldn't have to believe them. We'd just read about them in the papers.

In our First Reading, Moses makes a curious argument in telling the people to pledge themselves to their one true God. Moses appeals to God's singularity: not just that God is "one," but that God is unique. What Israel's God does, no other god can do. Their God not only made the world but makes history with every act of divine will.

We're with Moses on this one. Our God is a singular God whose signature act, from the Christian perspective, is the Incarnation. Since the Council of Nicaea, Christianity has confirmed that God became human so that humanity might share in divinity. Our Eucharist is an invitation to that shared life. The indwelling Spirit is one more sign of that incorporation. God is in us, and we are in God. We believe this. Fervently. And we doubt this. Routinely. The latest polls suggest that only one third of us practicing Catholics who come to church every Sunday really believe that Jesus Christ is present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist. We worship, but we doubt. Sometimes.

It's ironic to consider on the solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity that God is a perfectly integrated One-in-Three, and we can barely keep our singular selves together in one place for a quarter of an hour. The integrity of the Divine Will is mutually shared by Father, Son, and Spirit. And we seek to follow that Divine Will in our daily living.

What role does doubt play in your life? What builds up your faith? How?

How do you bring in new members into the Church and help to form them?

In today's Gospel, Jesus hands over the Great Commission in one smooth sentence: "Go, make disciples, baptize, and teach." We'd like to think the disciples might have been finished with their doubting, but chances are they weren't. So now they carry the double burden of presenting the Gospel to the whole world and having private reservations about the whole experience. So do we. But thankfully, Jesus doesn't just hand off the mission. He also adds my all-time favorite final clause: "And behold, I am with you always." This puts the last sentence into perspective. Jesus knows that our divided nature is not going to go away. We'll keep on dragging our doubts into our worship. But happily, the reverse is true. Wherever doubt takes us, our faith won't be far behind. AMEN!

[Readings: Zephaniah 3:14-18a; Isaiah 12:2-6; Luke 1:39-56]

Memorial Day, as Decoration Day gradually came to be known, originally honored only those lost while fighting in the Civil War. But during World War I, the United States found itself embroiled in another major conflict, and the holiday evolved to commemorate American military personnel who died in all wars.

For decades, Memorial Day continued to be observed on May 30, the date selected for the first Decoration Day. But in 1968, Congress passed the Uniform Monday Holiday Act, which established Memorial Day as the last Monday in May in order to create a three-day weekend for federal employees; the change went into effect in 1971. The same law also declared Memorial Day a federal holiday.

The 20th Century, and even into this century, brought with it wars, seemingly involving every generation, that would give new meaning to the words Supreme Sacrifice. Starting with the Spanish-American War in 1898, American blood was shed on foreign soil in WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, and then Iraq and Afghanistan, not to mention other far-off places around the world.

Although history has been less than kind in judging the wisdom of our policy-makers in involving us in many of these conflicts, what is beyond dispute is that in every war to which we have sent our young men and women, they have performed with courage and patriotism in the belief that they were serving the best interests of our nation.

For those of us who have been spared the horrors of war, it is difficult, if not impossible, to appreciate the sacrifices that have been made on our behalf by those who served -- and died, or returned scarred -- while wearing the uniform.

Today, the Universal Church celebrates the Feast of the Visitation of St. Elizabeth by Mary, the soon-to-be Mother of Jesus Christ. In one sense, I feel the two observances of Memorial Day and the Visitation can speak to each other.

The popular expression regarding one who dies, is that "they have gone to meet their Maker." What happens to our war dead when their appointed time comes for them to "meet their Maker?"

Like that first moment when Elizabeth and Mary greet each other, the first reaction of our war dead might be surprise. The best interpretation I have seen of this moment of the Visitation in a painted picture shows them pointing to each other and laughing out loud. Here is a woman beyond child-bearing years and a young, unmarried woman both expecting a surprise child.

In much the same way, our war dead, in those first few moments of death, could be standing before someone at the Pearly Gates with stunned surprise, maybe even shock. "Am I dead? Am I in Heaven? Are you God?"

Once over the initial shock, Elizabeth and Mary enter the home of Elizabeth and Zechariah and start comparing notes. How did this happen? What happens from here? How is God's hand in all of this? And then Mary sings her beautiful hymn, the Magnificat: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord."

The new arrival in Heaven asks the same questions: How did this happen? What happens from here? He or she is told, "There is no greater love than this, give up one's life for one's friends." And then they may be told some of the words we hear in today's First Reading from Zephaniah: "Shout for joy, be glad and exult, for the Lord has removed the judgement against you and has turned away your enemies. The Lord is in your midst. Fear not, be not discouraged. He will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love."

It is these, and all, brave Americans, who gave "the last full measure," whom we honor on Memorial Day. Without their heroic efforts, we would not be gathering here to remember and to pray for them.

And so we pray: Let us turn to you, Lord, in our grief and in our remembrance of the fallen. Guide us toward a harmonious existence as we honor those who were willing to give up their lives that we may enjoy responsible freedom. On this Memorial Day, we pray for peace and for those who gave all.

Eternal Rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. Amen. May their souls and all the victims of war, violence and terrorism, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. AMEN!

Universal Prayer of the Faithful

Priest: Let us pray for our brothers and sisters as they go forth with courage and determination to face the forces of violence, weapons of destruction and hearts filled with hate.

Deacon or Reader:

For our President, Congress, Supreme Court and our political and military leaders that they may tirelessly seek peaceful settlements to international disputes; we pray to the Lord:

That the Lord may preserve the members of our Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard and Air Force from all harm; we pray to the Lord:

That even in war, we may keep clearly before us the defense of all human rights, especially the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; we pray to the Lord:

That the families, relatives and friends of our military members may be strengthened in this time of concern and anxiety; we pray to the Lord:

That the Lord may help families with men and women in the armed forces to cope with daily challenges in the absence of their loved ones; we pray to the Lord:

That our homeland will be preserved from violence and terrorism and that the nations of the world will seek to work together in harmony and peace; we pray to the Lord:

That the hearts of all men and women will be moved to pursue true peace and justice; we pray to the Lord:

That violence may be overcome by peace; that weapons of destruction may be transformed into tools of justice, and that hate may give way to true charity; we pray to the Lord:

That grateful for and inspired by those veterans who have given their lives for our country we may bravely face the challenges ahead, and for all who have died, including those we are remembering at this liturgy; we pray to the Lord:

For the special needs we mention in the silence of our hearts (pause), we pray to the Lord.

Priest: Lord God, Almighty Father,
creator of mankind and author of peace,
as we are ever mindful of the cost paid for the liberty we possess.
We ask you to bless the members of our armed forces.
Give them courage, hope and strength.
May they ever experience your firm support, gentle love and compassionate healing.
Be their power and protector, leading them from darkness to light.
Hear these and all of our prayers, through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God,
and through Your Son Jesus Christ,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever. Amen.