

Announcement made by Fr. Nick before his Sunday Homily

REGARDING MY SEPTEMBER, 2024 LETTER
TO ALL REGISTERED PARISHIONERS

LET US HEAR FROM YOU... It has been seven years since we updated our list of registered parishioners, and three years since the COVID-19 restrictions were lifted and we went back to having public Masses. Prior to COVID, our average Sunday Mass attendance was 650 people. Since COVID, the very first week of public Masses, we only had 300 people return to regular Sunday Mass. This number was consistent for two years.

That number is slowly inching its way upward to 400 to 450 people per weekend. Attendance at the 11:00 AM Sunday Mass has gone from 100 to 200! Thanks be to God! And thanks be to YOU! We are growing! Please ignore any rumors that our parish is closing.

We would like to hear from those 200 folks who still have not yet returned to Mass.

I sent a letter to all registered parish households, especially to our absent brothers and sisters, asking them to prayerfully consider returning to Sunday Mass, tell us why they are not coming, or to let us know if their spiritual needs are being met elsewhere.

I ask ALL of you to return the response sheet so that we can begin an outreach to everyone to come “Back in the Pews” and to update our parish records. Thank you!

At the end of the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis, Indiana in July, all American Catholics – including US – were invited and challenged to “Walk with One” person who is away from the practice of the Faith and to invite them back to their spiritual home. Whom will YOU invite and accompany “Back in the Pew?” Ask the Holy Spirit to help you find them!

(Fr. Nick’s Homily for the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time follows.)

Genesis 2:18-24; Psalm 128; Hebrews 2:9-11; Mark 10:2-16]

Throughout the United States this weekend, we observe our annual “Respect Life” Sunday. We also begin October as Respect Life Month, and the Month of Our Lady’s Holy Rosary. It is a reminder of the call, each responsible Catholic has, to address the moral dilemmas of how to care for our aging members, the value of the unborn, the rightful place of those who are mentally or physically different, the rights of the undocumented alien, our responsibility toward the economically disadvantaged and the preservation of sacramental marriage and the family.

Tom McGrath is a veteran Catholic publisher, recently retired from Loyola Press. He is author of [Raising Faith-Filled Kids](#).

He says this: “I’ve been married dozens of times -- all to the same woman. In any relationship, you have to keep committing and recommitting as times and circumstances change and you come to know more about your partner and yourself. And, so a marriage is not a wedding day but a series of decisions to be for and with the other person “for better or for worse.” Love is not an emotion. It’s a choice.

“Sometimes the internal recommitment comes when you notice your attention drifting away to competing interests. Sometimes it comes after a fight. Sometimes it takes the form of deciding to fight to deal with all those resentments you’ve both been storing up. And sometimes you look across the dinner table and recognize the person you fell in love with long ago, and that memory re-energizes your life together.

Through the years, there will be plenty of opportunities to let your relationships wither and die. Yet the invitation is not just to endure but to access the love that once called you, to enter again into the dreams of your younger days, and to let your loving commitment blossom and grow in the midst of today's reality -- however difficult that might be. This is the ideal. We all fall short, giving us yet more opportunities to renew those commitments to the best of our ability.

The promise at the heart of marriage is the promise God makes to each of us: *"Whenever it comes time to decide again, it's a foregone conclusion that I will always and everywhere side with you."*

Just as Jesus worked His first miracle at the request of His Blessed Mother at Cana by turning water into wine, so too does Jesus transform those choppy waters of tension, trial, temptation and turmoil into a vintage wine of tried-and-true trust in marriage.

Historians, sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists all agree that the normative relationship for a man and woman's existence is that of husband, and wife, father and mother, and then home, industry, finance, culture, society and governing structures are more easily directed to virtue, responsibility and the restraint of the primitive lust and selfishness that wreak civilization.

Destroyed marriages mean destroyed families; destroyed families means destroyed neighborhoods; destroyed neighborhoods means destroyed cities, and destroyed cities means a destroyed nation.

Divorce among Catholic couples is only about 1/3, whereas the national average is now 55% among couples in general.

A couple married 50 years was asked the secret of their marriage. He said, "To keep our relationship fresh, we go out twice a week. I go out on Tuesday nights; she goes out on Thursday nights!

To keep the flame of faith alive in your marriage, I ask you to consider the various retreat opportunities for married couples. There is Marriage Encounter. Troubled Marriages can "Look Again" through the Retrouvaille program.

You will learn why marriage is reflected in nature and in the Church as the union of one man (Christ) to one woman (the Church.) And how if that is truly a sacramental union, it can never be broken.

And here is the key. If, God forbid, the marriage falls apart and ends in divorce, through the annulment process, a marriage is proven not to be truly a sacramental union, even if it takes place in a Catholic church. With an annulment, the Catholic parties are free to attempt marriage again, with someone else.

The annulment says what Jesus says in today's Gospel: IF you are married and divorced, you need an annulment. The annulment process which is the answer to Jesus' admonition in Matthew Ch. 16: "Whoever divorces, except for sexual immorality – and marries another, commits adultery." This is the situation of a couple without an annulment. Your prior union to your former spouse WAS a legal union; all children of that union ARE very much legitimate offspring, and the divorced person IS NOT automatically excommunicated.

What does the annulment say? It judges that based on the testimony of the person requesting the annulment, the testimony of the former spouse who is invited to participate in the annulment process; based on the testimony of five or more witnesses that YOU

select, and based on the examination of the staff of the Marriage Tribunal, it was not a sacramental marriage.

All involved parties agree that there is enough evidence to support that the marriage, while legal, was not sacramental.

Returning to the topic of Right to Life, and its place in our state, our country and our world, every Catholic voter needs to have a well-formed conscience when it comes to voting next month in the General Election taking place all across our nation.

I ask all Catholic voters to educate themselves, beginning by reading the Declaration of Independence and the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. In it, you will hear words like “unalienable rights given by the Creator” and that “all are created equal.” Our Founding Ancestors state most clearly that religion educates society, not that government gives us our basic rights. Our current American culture of death has it backwards and has it wrong.

Review the insert from a few weeks ago published by the Michigan Catholic Conference. It does not tell you whom to vote for, but to remember the moral principles of our Catholic Faith in making your choice.

A government without God or religion becomes totalitarian, dictatorial, fascist, and without a soul. We’ve seen that in Germany, Russia and now in China. You and I and every American make up the body that is America. The Spirit of God and our religion are America’s body and humanity’s soul. One cannot survive without them. May Mary, our Blessed Mother and the Protector of all life, pray for us, intercede for us, guide us and shield us with her motherly love. AMEN!

[Isaiah 53:10-11; Psalm 33; Hebrews 4:14-16 Mark 10:35-45]

A while back, I received an e-mail message that was entitled “Things I Really Don’t Understand.” It had a list of questions for which there seems to be no clear-cut answer. Here are a few of them:

- Why do doctors and lawyers call what they do “practice?”
- Why is “abbreviation” such a long word? Why is a boxing ring square?
- What was the best thing BEFORE sliced bread?
- How do they get the deer to cross the highway at those yellow signs?
- How did a fool and his money get together in the first place?

These questions represent a lighthearted humorous reminder that there are indeed many things in this life that we just really don’t understand. There are so many things in this life that we just cannot comprehend.

We don’t really understand disease. Why is a youngster perfectly healthy for 13 years of his life... and then suddenly just happens to be in a place, where he suddenly encounters some germ or bacteria that invades his body and destroys it?

And we don’t understand accidents. They are so random and indiscriminate. You start out a day that is like any other day... and then something happens in a matter of seconds... and life is forever different. You can never go back beyond that accident. On and on we could go with our list... of things we don’t really understand.

All of these difficult questions prompt us to raise yet another crucial question: What can we count on from God? When we face the

troubles of the world, the heartaches of life, and the tough challenges of this existence... what can we count on from God?

The First Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, says that even though Isaiah himself suffers so much for his community of faith, his faithful followers know that their Suffering Servant would die, and would live in “fullness of days.” He would live forever in the lives of believers who would be taught his teachings.

That first line of today’s First Reading has always been a problem to me. “The Lord was pleased to crush him in infirmity.”

It would lead people to say those very harmful words in the face of suffering, pain, loss or death, “It must be God’s will.” That kind of God somehow sadistically enjoys making us suffer and squirm.

God is like someone in a back yard holding a magnifying glass over an ant to watch it fry in the intensified heat, or like pulling the wings off a common house fly and see it can fly before it dies.

No, my God doesn’t operate like that.

When an automobile accident claimed the life of his son, someone tried to comfort a Protestant minister with the cliché: “It is God’s will.” He thundered back, “The heck it is! When my boy was killed, God was the first one who cried!” Now THAT sounds like my kind of God! No wonder that the first Christians would rely heavily on this passage from Sacred Scripture, especially during times of their own persecution, imprisonment, torture and death.

Our passage from the Letter to the Hebrews echoes the sentiment that we DO have a high priest who IS able to sympathize with our weaknesses; one who has been tested in every way yet did not sin. We CAN approach Jesus with confidence to receive the

mercy and the grace we need from His Cross and Resurrection to help us on our pilgrim way.

So it IS NO'T God's will when bad things happen to good people: illness and death, unemployment, changing schools, or when the car breaks down. LIFE happens. And Jesus helps us to deal with it, because the same LIFE happened to HIM, in many of the same ways.

Today is World Mission Sunday. Three powerful words. "Sunday:" the Day of the Lord when we remember and we become what Jesus did for us. "Mission:" we gather to scatter, to go out to all the places where we live and work and pray and play, giving witness.

We do this concretely for others out of our love for Jesus -- by meeting the spiritual, physical and mental needs of others. "World:" to remind ourselves that what we do is not just for our parish, our archdiocese or our country. It is universal, "Catholic" in Greek.

Our mission is to the almost-saints and to the big sinners, to the rich and to the poor, to men and women, to the young and to the old and to the in-between. Ours is a worldwide mission to make Jesus known and visible.

On this World Mission Sunday, we recall that even today, missionaries around the world are tramping through forests and deserts and mountains of self-denial both near and far for the sake of the Gospel and in the name of the Church, sometimes even to the point of suffering and death. They do this on our behalf, and with our prayers and our funds. Their "pain" is gain for everyone. Support them with your prayers and with your contributions.

This week's reflection questions:

- When have you had to endure suffering and pain with Jesus?
- In what ways have you felt God's kindness?

We are called to approach God with confidence and with boldness. Because we know that Jesus Christ went ahead of us and left us an example to follow.

So now we can receive God's grace and mercy and peace. Because THIS is God's will for us! AMEN!

[Readings: Jer.31:7-9; Ps.126; Heb.5:1-6; Mark 10:46-52]

Do you remember learning the Five Senses when you were in grade school? Hearing, seeing, smelling tasting and feeling. To lose any of our senses would be terrible. I think the worst sense to lose for me, would be the sense of sight. I am a very visual person. I like to look at things that delight the eyes. Certainly, looking at the sun shining through the autumn leaves in Michigan can leave us breathless at times.

Mark in today's Gospel, gives us the second story of a blind man healed of his blindness. The first miracle happens as Jesus leaves Jerusalem and begins his public ministry. Today's miracle happens as Jesus ends his three years of preaching, teaching and healing and He heads back home for what awaits Him.

Mark deliberately places these two miracles at the beginning and at the end of the public life of Jesus for a reason. He wants us to "see" and understand his Gospel message. "What do you want Me to do for you?" Jesus asks. "Master, I want to see." This is the simplest yet most profound request you or I or Bartimaeus can ask. "I want to see." I want to see not only with the eyes of my head, but with the eyes of my mind, with the eyes of my heart, with the eyes of my soul. I want to understand. I want to believe.

Isn't this what you and I hope to achieve in our lifetimes? The wisdom, the knowledge, the understanding of life and how to handle its problems and its blessings? To find my own identity, to know who I am and what God expects of me?

This request is easy to make, and much more difficult to accept when Jesus gives us the profound answer: “Go on your way; your faith has SAVED you.” It can also be translated, “Your faith has HEALED you.” Which is easier to receive, healing or salvation?

We don’t know how young or how old Bartimaeus is, but he still speaks for all of us, especially our young people. He asks for something much deeper than mere physical eyesight. We can imagine him saying, “Lord Jesus, give me sight. Let me see again. Let me see the way in front of me. Heal me of whatever it is that is keeping me from seeing.”

This is what Jesus “sees” in the man’s heart, in his very soul. This is what Jesus “sees” when He looks you and me right in the eye when He asks, “What do you want me to do for YOU?” What DO you want Jesus to do for you today? Take a silent moment to think about that... Now imagine one of the crowd saying to you today, “Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you.” What is keeping us from “springing up” to come to Jesus today?

Jeremiah, our prophet from today’s First Reading, knew first-hand how it was to follow the Lord, and what it would cost him. He would be mocked, threatened and assaulted by those who wished to silence him and the truth he preached. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us of what priests must go through each day “beset” with our own weakness, struggles and sin. After we have the courage to cry out to Jesus, and to “get up,” the journey with him is no cake walk.

When St. Mark tells us that immediately Bartimaeus receives his sight and follows Jesus “on the way,” he reminds us that it is not

going to be like dancing along the Yellow Brick Road. Jesus is “on the way” to Jerusalem. This means that Jesus is on his way to His suffering and imprisonment, His torture and His execution, His death and His Glorious Resurrection.

Jesus is calling each one of YOU to see, to understand and to follow Him. In the busy-ness of your lives, don't become blind to the messes that begin to take over your lives. In the many demands made on your time, your talent, your energy, look for, find and “see” the possibilities for doing good and for affirming yourself and one another.

Tom McGrath is a Catholic journalist from Chicago. He shares this story. “One day at work I got a call from my wife. She was dealing with a difficult situation at home, but she caught me at an awkward time when I was up to my ears in deadlines, and I was neither much help nor much support. We both ended the call feeling lost and hurt and confused. Rather than sit and stew, I took a break and walked over to St. Peter's, a church in downtown Chicago that's open all day long. As I sat in one of the back rows off to the side, I saw dozens, if not hundreds of people come in, kneel down, and say their prayers. A number of them looked like I felt -- in need of some kind of help.

Then I remembered the question Jesus puts to Bartimaeus:
“What do you want Me to do for you?”

Like Bartimaeus I prayed, “Master, I want to see.” I wanted to see a different and better way of acting. I wanted to see what I had done wrong and a way to make it right. I wanted to see beyond my own hurt feelings to a place where my wife and I were partners again

rather than at odds. I think a lot of us in the church that day were offering the same prayer: “Master, I want to see.”

I’m sure that once I made my prayer and went back to work, God found little ways throughout the day to let me see the way. For me, it usually doesn’t come as a flash of light, but the divine light shines nonetheless. And the more I ask, the more I see.”

My friends, remember that Jesus Christ has given you a new spiritual insight to recognize Him, to fall in love with Him, and to follow Him “on the way” which He has marked out especially for you alone. Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you! This week’s reflection questions:

Can you be that trustingly open with God, voicing your own needs and yearnings?

What stumbling blocks do you experience on YOUR spiritual journey? Do you believe that God longs to remove them? How do you help people remove stumbling blocks from THEIR lives?

Do you “deal patiently with the ignorant and erring” because you are aware of your own weaknesses?

And the ultimate question: What do you want Jesus to do for YOU? AMEN!