

[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.

The two things that babies and toddlers do in church -- and this has happened in every parish that I have been assigned -- the first is when a baby discovers his screaming voice echoing in church. It's a new experience to hear his own voice echoing over the walls, so he does it again and again and again with a delightful smile on his wondering, "How long can I keep this up?" to the annoyance of the priest trying to preach or pray (smile). The second is when they are able to walk and run and discover the pews are like a playscape, ready for them to run up and down and in and out! That's how babies and toddlers are programmed at that age! (Smile)

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, 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 and the larger chores inside and outside the home. Older parents are asking for help more and more with holidays and other celebrations and chores. 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. Right? (Some chuckles in the congregation.) It was now their turn. They look on with love and gratitude.

When ask how it feels to pass the torch on to another new generation, they eagerly reply: "Blessed. How blessed I am by God." Even though their physical abilities become more and more limited by age and infirmity, no matter what pain we encounter in life, we are blessed.

Young or old, 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.

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 complain about the negatives in our lives, the misfortunes of life. The losses in life. 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. Ultimately, that you and I have failed and made mistakes in life.

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. Can you imagine what this world would have been like without the influence and inspiration of the Christian Catholic Church for two thousand years?

This is why it's good for us in America on this Independence Day weekend 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. The words, "Take no money bag, no sack, no sandals sounds pretty appealing to me to "travel light!" Practical advice as I prepare for my summer break. Practical advice for all of us who tend to carry excess baggage!

The disciples expected 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. At least for now.

God hoped in Israel. God hopes in the Church. God hopes in us. You are a disciple. Jesus has sent you on ahead of him to preach and heal -- to bring the deep peace of God to people. It's a bit frightening at times, this mission you're on, because it's a path that doesn't promise much earthly security and sometimes leaves you vulnerable. Like the Way of the Cross, it can be difficult, even painful. At times, you may even face rejection. From family and friends, from neighbors and co-workers.

But you walk on anyway with even steps, proclaiming the peace of the kingdom of God, intent on your mission and shaking the dust from your feet when necessary. Those stops every week for sustaining meals, for the nourishment of word and table, help, too, as does the assurance of union with God at the end. Rejoice that our names are written in Heaven! AMEN!

[Readings: Isaiah 57:15-19; Ps.85; Phil 4:6-9, John 14:23-29]

The “teaser” question I asked at the end of each of the three Masses this past weekend was this: “What is the difference between being patriotic and being a nationalist?” The simple, short answer is this: the patriot says, “For my God and my country.” God is first in the life of a citizen of any nation. Because St. Paul reminds us that all of us are called to become and to identify ourselves as having “our citizenship is in Heaven.”

The nationalist defends and protects his or her own country in all situations. Instead of saying, “For my God and my country,” the nationalist says, “My country, right or wrong.” I have seen this phrase on a bumper sticker, usually on the back bumper of redneck trucks! The patriot can never say this.

Any country allegiance is secondary. I am reminded of the final words spoken by St. Thomas Moore before he was executed as a martyr for the faith.

St. Thomas Moore was the close friend of King Henry VIII in England. King Henry made Moore the Chancellor of England, which was the second in command office in England. King Henry was refused an annulment by Rome from his first marriage, and in retaliation, King Henry proclaimed himself the head of the Church of England and demanded all in authority in the government and in the Church sign an Oath of Allegiance. Sir Thomas Moore refused, and it would cost him his life. As he knelt before his executioner to be beheaded, his last words were these: “I die as the King’s servant, but God’s first.”

That is what each patriotic American Catholic says. I am a citizen of the United States of America, but I am called to be a citizen of Heaven.”

Nationalism is more exclusive, more divisive and not the kind of citizenship we are called to embrace. Patriotism means to pay your taxes, to follow legitimate laws, to vote in our elections and to defend our country in the military. Patriotism also means to speak truth to power when necessary, and to uphold the values and principles of our faith when they are threatened or attacked.

As Pope St. John Paul II noted in his book “Memory and Identity”:  
“Patriotism is a love for everything to do with our native land: its history, its traditions, its language, and its natural features. It is a love which extends also to the works of our compatriots and the fruits of their genius.”

Patriotism is bound up with the reality of a particular people in a particular place. It’s a reality that young children, whose horizons are limited, come by naturally (and we know what the Lord said about learning to be like young children). We come to know the wider world, and the people in it, by analogy to the little world in which we live our daily lives. It’s within that daily life that patriotism blossoms. And the life of our community matters more than the community we call the nation, because a nation has life only to the extent that the communities that compose it thrive. And so we seek, and spend our lives as St. Paul reminds us, pursuing and sharing “whatever is lovable, honorable, pure, true and just, having no anxiety.”

As John Paul II knew, there are lessons to be drawn for the life of the Church from our experience of patriotism (and warnings to be drawn from our experience of nationalism).

Please God, bless us to be good patriots, and to dedicate our lives to our God and to our Country. As you promised Isaiah, revive us, heal and lead us. As we sang in the Responsorial Psalm, give peace to your people, that kind of peace that Your Son Jesus Christ speaks of in today’s Gospel. That which will bring us lasting joy, contentment and fulfillment. Help us to keep your words and commandments. Send your advocate to teach, remind and help us in our journey of faith. And at our journey’s end, open up the gates of Heaven to welcome us into your loving and forgiving arms. AMEN!

[Some parts are taken from an article written by Scott P. Richert, publisher for Our Sunday Visitor, July 4, 2021.]

[Readings: Gen. 18:1-10a; Psalm 15; Col. 1:24-28; Lk. 10:38-42]

Our readings this weekend focus on the live, active and transforming work of the Holy Spirit in our Salvation History, especially through the ministry of hospitality. In our First Reading, what is Abraham's reaction when God appears as three strangers? Does Abraham prostrate himself at their feet and remain in an attitude of perpetual adoration? Does he beg for wise teaching or seek moral instruction about certain matters?

No, he springs into extreme hospitality. He is banging pots and pans for quite a while before he exchanges one word with his special company. And this would have been in keeping with the Jewish moral code, which placed hospitality as the highest response to others in need. St. Paul calls this "unknowingly ministering to angels." St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta calls it "serving God in the distressed disguise of the poor." Jesus calls it being Good Samaritans, as we heard in last Sunday's Gospel.

Abraham's wife, Sarah, is no longer confined to her tent in the role of a domestic. Like Martha in today's Gospel, she comes into the presence of the three guests with flour on her hands certainly, but deals with them directly. None of this should be happening. None of this was allowed to happen in the culture of that time. OR in the time of Jesus with Martha and Mary. But the Holy Spirit is doing live, active and transforming work in the history of our salvation.

True hospitality seeks out the needs of the guests and tries to meet them as best as possible. How hospitable are we to each other when we enter this dwelling and encounter each other? Sometimes the only Bible people encounter is the Bible you present to them!

*When have you welcomed the presence of God in an unexpected way?*

One of my favorite stories about Dorothy Day was the time she was being interviewed by a young reporter at a Catholic Worker House. A similar story has been attributed to a saintly Cardinal Archbishop in South America Dom Helder Camara and to Blessed Solanus Casey. It seemed that every few minutes into the interview the doorbell would ring.

Dorothy would politely excuse herself and tend to the one in need. After a number of such interruptions, the reporter became frustrated and wondered out loud why it didn't seem to bother Dorothy. She was as calm and serene as ever. She smiled at him and told him that every time the doorbell rang it was an opportunity for her to serve Jesus, and what could be more important than that?

*How do you respond to the interruptions in your day and in your life?*

I got into theological trouble with a Pentecostal friend of mine when today's Second Reading came up: "In my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the Church." She thought I was implying that the redeeming suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross was somehow imperfect, and lacking in something. Far from it!

His sacrifice was once and for all, total, complete and fulfilling the Father's will. That is what we re-present every time we celebrate Mass. Nothing about that is imperfect! But what IS imperfect is when we fail to unite the sufferings you and I are going through right now, with that perfect suffering of Christ. This passage from Saint Paul reminds us that the crosses in our lives are not meaningless. If we use our cross to unite ourselves with Christ Crucified, our suffering is transformed into an act of love for God. The Holy Spirit is doing live, active and transforming work in the history of our salvation.

*How do you find the strength and energy to face your challenges?*

It has been a very difficult few weeks for our country and for some countries around the world. The ongoing wars, terrorist attacks, the multiple attacks and killings by disoriented men, the dozens of attacks on our pro-life facilities. The whole world without God turning upside down.

When you and I share in these sufferings, and in the domestic and demonic sufferings of abuse, bullying and worse, we fill up what is still empty in the sufferings of Christ, who sees, who listens, who stands by us, and who weeps with us. And who, as a good Minister of Hospitality, gives us a message of hope in His Word and who feeds us with His Very Self. AMEN!

[Readings: Genesis 18:20-32; Psalm 138; Colossians 2:12-14; Luke 11:1-3]

A year and a half ago, Our Holy Father Pope Francis announced the establishment of a World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly as a reminder of the important role they play as a link between generations. The day will be celebrated every year on the Sunday closest to the Feast of Saints Joachim and Anne, parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Jesus' grandparents. He said,

“It is important for grandparents to meet their grandchildren and for grandchildren to meet their grandparents because — as the prophet Joel says — grandparents, before their grandchildren, will dream and have great desires, and young people — taking strength from their grandparents — will go forward and prophesy.” Referring to the Feb. 2 Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, the pope said the recognition of Christ as the Messiah by the elderly Simeon and Anna is a reminder that “the Holy Spirit still stirs up thoughts and words of wisdom in the elderly today.”

“Their voice is precious because it sings the praises of God and safeguards the roots of peoples,” he said. “They remind us that old age is a gift and that grandparents are the link between generations, passing on the experience of life and faith to the young.”

“Grandparents are often forgotten and we forget this wealth of preserving roots and passing on,” he added.

In the encyclical, [‘Fratelli Tutti,’](#) the Holy Father reminds us that no one is saved alone. With this in mind, we must treasure the spiritual and human wealth that has been handed down from generation to generation,” he said.

“Today, more than ever, we are committed to making every effort to dismantle the throwaway culture and to enhance the charisms of grandparents and the elderly.”

On this World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, Pope Francis said he is worried about how an individualistic society treats its older members, and he urged young people to give them love and attention.



“I worry when I see a society full of people in constant motion, too caught up in their own affairs to have time for a glance, a greeting or a hug. Our grandparents, who nourished our own lives, now hunger for our attention and our love; they long for our closeness. Let us lift up our eyes and see them, even as Jesus sees us,” he stated.

In his message for the second World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, the Holy Father urges the Catholics to pray for grandparents and elderly people, calling them "teachers of tenderness."

Pope Francis highlighted the importance of the elderly to our society. He exhorted Catholics to pray for them and to take extra care of them.

“We elderly people often have a special sensitivity for care, for reflection, and affection”, Pope said. They also have many gifts to offer the community.

“Let us pray for the elderly, that they may become teachers of tenderness so that their experience and wisdom may help young people to look towards the future with hope and responsibility”, he added.

He also stated that our world, which is rife with conflict, needs "a true revolution of tenderness" and that the elderly may help reduce some of society's harshness.

The pope asked all believers to pray for the longevity of the elderly so that their experience and knowledge may inspire young people to look to the future with optimism and responsibility.

The theme for this year's observance of the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly is "In Old Age They Will Still Bear Fruit" (Ps. 92:15). The theme is intended to highlight how grandparents are a blessing to society and the Church.

Pope Francis encouraged the elderly to continue to spread the Gospel even in their old age. “There is something beautiful here. Your prayer is a very precious resource: a deep breath that the Church and the world urgently need,” he stated. Francis said the Church needs “a new covenant between young and old.”

He urged young adults to visit their grandparents, their elderly relatives, and the older people in their neighborhood.

“They protected us as we grew, and now it is up to us to protect their lives, to alleviate their difficulties, to attend to their needs and to ensure that they are helped in daily life and not feel alone,” he said.

The ideas shared in the following paragraphs are the simple life experiences of grandparents evangelizing. I hope they inspire ideas in you that meet the needs and circumstances of your family and fill you with the confidence to put them into action.

One grandmother took every opportunity to point out God’s work in their lives and expressed gratitude for the smallest of blessings. “Thank you, Jesus,” she would say continuously throughout each day. This simple prayer leaves an impression. Make your faith known, tell your story and shed light on others.

Invite the Holy Spirit into your conversations; remember Jesus promised, “He will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you” (Jn 14:26). Create relationships where young people feel free to express their thoughts. Listen respectfully. Someone once told me that people remember how we make them feel more than what we say.

If health and practical considerations allow, consider getting involved in activities the kids love and find ways to bring Jesus along.

Include your grandchildren in your Christian service work. Service can be a reentry point for young people who have fallen away from the faith.

Consider bringing back old or creating new faith-based traditions for every holiday celebration.

Finally, teach them to pray. Pray with them and over them. It is a powerful witness for a child to see their grandparent openly express their faith.

Pope Francis noted that for many of us, our grandparents “cared for us, ever since we were children. Despite lives of hard work and sacrifice, they were never too busy for us, or indifferent to us. They looked at us with care and tender love.”

“When we were growing up and felt misunderstood or fearful about life’s challenges, they kept an eye on us; they knew what we were feeling, our hidden

tears and secret dreams,” he continued. “They held us in their arms and sat us on their knees. That love helped us grow into adulthood.”

“May we never regret that we were insufficiently attentive to those who loved us and gave us life,” he stated. At the funeral of baseball great Stan Musial, one of his grandsons said, “My grandfather always made nobodies feel like somebodies.” God does the same to us. Let us do the same for ourselves and for each other. AMEN!

[Readings: Eccles. 1:2, 2:21-23; Ps. 90; Col. 3:1-5, 9-11; Lk. 12:13-21]

In every parish I've been in, when today's Gospel passage of the foolish wealthy man comes up, I ask the parishioners, "If YOU had only 24 or 48 hours to live, how YOUR life would be different? What would YOU do differently? The answers are the same. The older parishioners usually say, "I would put my affairs in order. I would make amends and peace with God and with any people who are estranged from me. I would visit my family and friends. I would give buckets of money to my parish." (I added that last one!) The younger ones say, "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die!"

I know a man who rushed to early retirement at 50. His intention was to get out of the rat race as soon as possible, so he spent the first 30 years after college making a small fortune. When it was over, he'd done well, sold his company, and set out to relax. So what do you suppose did since then?

What he has done since retirement, is tinker with his portfolio. Every day, he rises only to face his computer and crunch the numbers. He is obsessed with where the money goes and how it grows. All the best energy of his life has been given to his money: first in making it, and now in managing it. It does seem, objectively, as if he's never escaped the rat race after all. One day, he was found dead, in his study, utterly alone. "You fool! This night your life will be demanded of you!" "All is vanity." It is all gone in a whisper.

In the parable of the rich man who stores up his wealth, Jesus warns us not to get caught up in the acquisitions game. Life might end at any moment for any of us. What do YOU want to do with your life? What do YOU want to do with the rest of your life? And what about the things of your life?

In today's Gospel, Jesus refuses to arbitrate an estate squabble between two brothers: a quarrel born of greed that has become a wedge between siblings who should value their faith, family, hope and Heaven above their possessions.

Of the seven sins termed deadly, confessors often note that penitents readily accuse themselves of anger, lust, laziness, jealousy, and pride. But greed and gluttony are rarely mentioned, in a society awash in materialism and consumption. What's going on? Have we been taught that "Greed is good?" Is the valid medical term, "disorder," used to excuse us for our addiction to things?

Jesus said to the man concerned about his brother's inheritance, "Guard against all greed." He further noted that "one may be rich" but "life does not consist of possessions." Wealth is not the killer; treating it like a ticket to personal privilege is. Quothleth pretty much says the same thing in today's First Reading.

The name Quothleth means "a gatherer of students" or a "collector of wisdom." Wouldn't that be wonderful to have that as one of our goals in life? To collect wisdom as we age. What is the saying, "With age comes wisdom?" But sometimes age comes alone! Another expression says, "Too soon old and too late smart!" Poor Quothleth takes a skeptical look at wealth, fame, pleasures and earthly possessions. There is nothing new under the sun!

Our Second Reading from St. Paul offers a clear alternative to the things of this world that he says lead to futility and meaninglessness. Paul tells us that things of this earth don't sustain us and don't endure. How long did it take before we were completely bored with that game, that toy, or that gift that we absolutely had to have for Christmas or for our birthday?

Baptism and our journey of faith point our gaze upward, to the things of eternal and everlasting life. The corrupt things of this life only lead to destruction.

But the world doesn't see this. Sometimes we don't even see it ourselves. This is that life that is "hidden in Christ" so that when Christ comes back, we too will appear with Him in glory.

St. Paul sees our earthly sins like a cancer – a fatal spiritual disease that leads only to eternal death. Thus, it will be for all who store up treasures for themselves on earth but are not rich in what matters to God.

St. Paul reminds us to keep our focus on what is above while we are on earth: faith, family, hope and Heaven. So... What do YOU want to do with YOUR life? What are you doing with YOUR things? How can you fill your days with what is truly important? The best things in life... aren't things! The Hebrew word for *vanity* literally means "breath" or "vapor": something fleeting and lacking substance. Let us work for what is truly lasting, "what matters to God." Let us use all that we have as responsible stewards to build up the Kingdom of God, here on earth and up there in Heaven. AMEN!