

Our Faith in Action

American Martyrs Catholic Community

A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

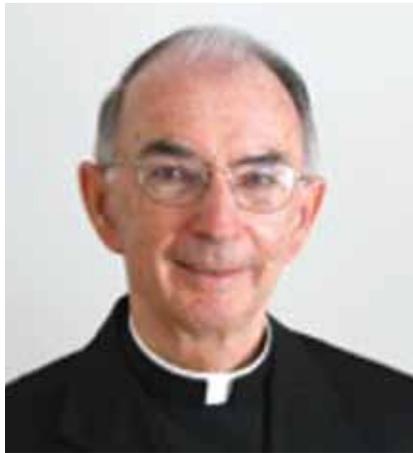
Faith In Action Newsletter

Dear Parishioners,

I just love being a Roman Catholic. I love being a priest among you. Each day I thank God for my faith and see the teachings of Jesus Christ as a pathway of happiness protecting me from confusions and disorientations that can so easily take me away from the truth.

I anchor my faith in the life, death and resurrection of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I do not allow my faith to be controlled by any action of another human being. It is so easy to walk away from the One who is our life and salvation because of what another human being says or does.

So many people are amazed at the early actions of Pope Francis. He and all of our Popes in our lifetime have shown us what it means to be servants of Jesus. Our expectations for them will always be the same, that their personalities may allow us to see the different faces of Jesus. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI gave us pause to remember the Jesus who withdrew to the mountains, the desert, the lake to be alone in prayer. Pope Fran-



cis seems to be directing us more to the Jesus who entered the lives of the people through the hustle and bustle of everyday living and suffering. Both faces are essential for life on our faith journey. Both Popes have and will show us the opposite of their own personalities as they fulfill their leadership role as the Vicar of Christ.

There are certain faith essentials for all of us as children of God and some expressions of our faith that are particular to our Catholic faith. In this Easter season I would like to ask you to reflect on one in particular. This is the observance of the third commandment, "Keep holy the Sabbath day." In my hearing of this commandment and remembering the teachings of Jesus, this commandment for Catholics is fulfilled first and foremost by our participating in Mass each Sabbath (begins with Saturday Vigil). Our Lord reminded us that He came to fulfill the law, not to abolish it on any way. We celebrate that fulfillment in the reenactment of His perfect sacrifice on Calvary. In

POPE BENEDICT'S LEGACY OF HUMILITY ON DISPLAY DURING UNIQUE TRANSITION

As of Thursday, Feb. 28 the Catholic Church was left without a pope for the first time since the death of Blessed John Paul II in April 2005.

As most of us already know, this is the first time since the 1400s that a pope has resigned the chair of St. Peter during his lifetime.

Following the Holy Father's formal resignation, the College of Cardinals gathered for the papal conclave March 12 to select a new pontiff, and one day later, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio became Pope Francis when he was elected as the Church's 266th pope.

Looking back on the legacy of now-Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, it is perhaps too soon to attribute a defining characteristic. Nevertheless, there is one trait that comes to the minds of many — humility.

A quiet and meek man throughout his career, Benedict's resignation announcement issued on Feb. 11 came as both surprising and fitting. In it, he humbly submitted that the papal office demanded more than he was capable of giving.

"After having repeatedly examined my conscience before God, I have come to the certainty that my strengths, due to an advanced age, are no longer suited to an adequate exercise of the Petrine ministry," the Holy Father said.

A striking contrast to the end of the previous papacy — in which Pope John Paul II very publicly offered up his suffering and death — Benedict noted that the challenges the Church currently faces call for a strength of mind and body in the pontiff that he simply could no longer offer.

"I am well aware that this ministry, due to its essential spiritual nature, must be carried out not only with words and deeds, but no less with prayer and suffering," he said. "However, in today's world, subject to so many rapid changes and shaken by questions of deep relevance for the life of faith, in order to govern the barque of St. Peter and proclaim the Gospel, both strength of mind and body are necessary, strength which in the last few months, has deteriorated in me to the extent that I have had to recognize my incapacity to adequately fulfill the ministry entrusted to me."



Experts — and laymen — will continue to debate Pope Benedict's decision for years to come. But one thing that cannot be denied is the humility by which his pontificate will be defined.

Bidding a final goodbye to his brother bishops and cardinals on Feb. 28, Benedict revealed one last time that his papacy was not about him, but about Him whom he served.

"I want to tell you that I will continue to be close to you in prayer, especially in the next few days, so that you may all be fully docile to the action of the Holy Spirit in the election of the new Pope," he said. "May the Lord show you what is willed by Him. And among you, among the College of Cardinals, there is also the future Pope, to whom, here to today, I already promise my unconditional reverence and obedience."

As 1.2 billion Catholics around the world are now celebrating Pope Francis as the new shepherd of the Universal Church, we are uniquely blessed to have both a vibrant new pope in the Vatican and a saintly pope-emeritus still offering his prayers nearby.

For the time being, Benedict will live in the papal residence at Castel Gandolfo before returning to an old convent at the Vatican where he will lead a quiet life of prayer.

BAPTISM PREPARATION:

Welcoming the Newest Members of the Church

The Sacrament of Baptism is an important rite of passage for any child born into a Catholic family — it is the beginning of the process in which we become full members of the Catholic Church. However, as infants, we are not fully aware of our welcoming into the Church. Parents and godparents must therefore be adequately informed about and prepared for the sacrament that they have chosen for their children to receive.

“Parents need to fully understand the commitment they are making for their child and the covenant they are making with God,” says Suzie Rose, who, along with Deacon Fred Rose, is a coordinator and instructor for infant baptisms. “They are vowing to raise their children in our Catholic faith — they are making that agreement with God.”

Serving as a godparent is a wonderful example of stewardship in action. Godparents give of their time and talent by not only praying for the child and parents, but also by serving as a spiritual advisor. Since godparents represent the spiritual community of the parish, it is important for them to be of strong faith and moral character.

“At least one must be a confirmed Catholic,” says Suzie. “If married, the godparent must be married in the Church. Non-Catholics are referred to as Christian witnesses, and must be baptized in a recognized Christian faith. Whether Catholic or Protestant, each must be actively practicing his or her faith.”



The godparents should be present at the baptism — in cases where they are unable to attend, parents must select someone to stand in for them. This person, the proxy, can be anyone who is old enough to understand what is happening, but cannot be either the parent or the person administering the sacrament.

American Martyrs holds one baptism preparation class each month. Both parents and godparents are required to attend one class. If they are unable to take the class at American Martyrs, they may attend another parish's class and present documentation upon completion. The American Martyrs class schedule is on the parish website. No registration is needed.

“The parents must meet with one of us sometime before the baptism for an interview to obtain the necessary data and to ask questions,” says Suzie. “At that time, they schedule the date. Both the class and interview must take place before the baptism.”

Classes also include parent witnesses who share advice on raising children in the faith, as well as min-

istry leaders who share information about the parish's many resources.

“We attempt to present the information they need in simple, human language,” Suzie says. “We have a good number of parents who have returned to church and even send their friends to come to our class and register at American Martyrs.”

Children should typically be baptized before they reach six months of age.

“Most parents wait until the doctor says the child can be in crowds,” says Suzie. “In case of serious illness, the baby should be baptized immediately, with the fulfillment of the ceremonies scheduled at a later date. If the child is approaching 5 years old, we refer the parents to our director of Religious Education for Special Religious Education classes in preparation for baptism and First Eucharist.”

Baptisms are normally scheduled during the first three Sundays of the month. Parents may request a priest or deacon, and Suzie and Deacon Fred try to schedule the baptism for the day on which that priest or deacon is assigned. If there is a large number of children scheduled to be baptized, the priests and deacons will rotate. Community Baptisms — individual baptisms in a community setting — are usually limited to no more than eight children at a time.

For more information about the Sacrament of Baptism and preparation, please contact Deacon Fred and Suzie Rose at deaconfred@americanmartyrs.org or srose@americanmartyrs.org.

MAKING A JOYFUL NOISE TO THE LORD: *American Martyrs Music Ministry*



In Psalm 100 we hear, “Serve the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful song.” The American Martyrs Music Ministry, through its members’ gifts of time and talent, is helping our parish family raise our voices to the Lord in joyful song.

Led by Music Director Bill Svarda, this ministry guides us in worship via words and music at five weekend Masses, Holy Days of Obligation, weddings, funerals, and other special occasions.

The Community Choir sings at the Saturday 5 p.m. Vigil Mass. However, the Sunday Masses vary slightly in their musical components — the 8 a.m. Mass has a cantor and piano musical combination, while the 9:30 a.m. and the 5 p.m. Masses generally consist of contemporary music, and the 11:30 a.m. choir leans towards more traditional music. In addition, American Martyrs has an amazingly talented Children’s Choir, which occasionally sings at the Saturday 5 p.m. Mass.

“I’ve always thought that our strength is in our diversity,” Bill says. “If we’re trying to do exactly the same thing, we just all do it in different ways. The groups and directors have different approaches, and I think that’s really healthy. I think we all understand that what we do involves the congregation. We’re not primarily performing groups, we are involving the congregation in music and experiencing the Mass more fully. That’s our prime directive — inviting participation and making it possible for the congregation to engage.”

One of the few forms of live music left in a digi-

tal world, liturgical music remains a crucial component of our Sunday celebration of the Eucharist.

“I have learned so much about liturgy due directly to my role in providing music,” says Deacon Derek Brown, co-director for the 5 p.m. Sunday Mass. “Music is so very important. It is the ribbon that runs through the entire worship experience, from beginning to end. It allows us to transcend time and space, and feel and express the emotion that is provoked when we contemplate the gift that is celebrated each time we gather as the Body of Christ and receive the Body of Christ in the Eucharist.”

Between the music director, the four choir directors and the many generous volunteers, this ministry is brimming with talent and a passion for music of all kinds.

Originally from Ohio, Bill started playing trombone in second grade. By the time he was a sophomore in high school, he was playing professionally with bands. He has performed at dances, circuses, ice shows, in symphonies, and has tutored and taught musicians. Having earned a degree from the College Conservatory of Music in Cincinnati, he writes, composes and arranges music.

“My first experience with music at American Martyrs was a Christmas show that Msgr. Deegan had written,” Bill says. “He would hum to me and I wrote the music, the actual notes, to paper. After that, I began directing the 11:30 choir, then the next year, the 9:30 choir. The next thing you know, I’ve been directing the Music Ministry for over 30 years.”

Many of the members of this ministry have a

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rich musical past, and have experienced deeper conversion through serving in this ministry.

“My dad was part of the South Bay Symphony during the 1970s and 1980s, and was part of the 11:30 choir here at American Martyrs,” Deacon Derek says. “My mom would listen to Broadway musicals as she cleaned the house, and she would sing to me as a child. I began 30 years ago, providing music by myself, at the 5 p.m. Saturday Liturgy. Msgr. Barry facilitated my move over to help 5 p.m. Sunday. I am forever grateful for Msgr. Barry asking me to lead music shortly after he arrived. I had never played music like that before. I told him I had no idea what to do, but he said I would be fine. He was right, of course. That was the beginning of my ongoing education in the ways of liturgy.”

The Music Ministry is continually working to engage the congregation, the parish family, in prayer through song throughout the liturgy.

“Our goal is hopefully, someday, to have everyone singing, and it seems like we are making steady progress towards that long-term goal,” says Sean Mahon, the Saturday choir director. “I have loved and appreciated all forms of music as far back as I can remember. Music, like everything, is one of God’s wonderful gifts. It has certainly always served to help anchor and deepen my faith. In a Mass or other worship service, music can powerfully serve the particular needs of an individual at a given moment, while at the same time helping to serve the entire congregation, hopefully helping to lead and bring everyone together in their communal worship.”

In addition to planning for each weekend and to encourage participation, Bill and the choir directors meet quarterly to discuss the vision of the music before each liturgical season. The leadership of this ministry is fueled by Bill, the choir directors, Msgr. Barry, the ministry members and so many others.

“You can’t do all this without good leadership,” Bill says. “Msgr. Barry is amazing to work for and with, as are the other directors. We’re always trying to improve and look ahead. Additionally, we have so many talented musicians, many of whom have been around just as long or longer than I have.”

One such volunteer is choir member Shirley Esbhaugh, a vocalist and choir member of 25 years.

“Being part of the choir has added richly to my life in so many ways,” Shirley says. “The Mass has become more spiritual to me, and the friendships I have developed in the choir are some of my deepest and longest lasting. I believe that singing beautiful spiritual music together creates a bond among us. Most of the choir members have been with us for many years. The more involved I become with my church, the more I love it, and singing has been a major part of it.”

For those of us who would put singing further down our list of talents, the good news is that a joyful noise to the Lord is the sound of our voices, the singing of his praises, whether that be melodic or otherwise. For, as it says in Psalms 147, “Hallelujah! How good to sing praise to our God.”

CELEBRATING THE EASTER SEASON

Now that we have entered the month of April, Easter Sunday has come and gone.

But Easter is not over.

While Easter fell this year on March 31, the celebration of the greatest feast day of the Church year continues.

On Easter Sunday, we celebrate Christ rising from the dead, following His gruesome passion and death. On that glorious Sunday – three days after He died – Christ fulfilled His promise, “Destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in three days” (Jn. 2:19) and the promises of the Old Covenant, “I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers. He will strike at your head while you strike at His heel” (Gen. 3:15).

Through His resurrection, Jesus broke the chains of sin and death, opening for us the way to eternal life. Yet, His mission was not yet over. He was back with His disciples, showing them that what had been promised to their fathers had been fulfilled.

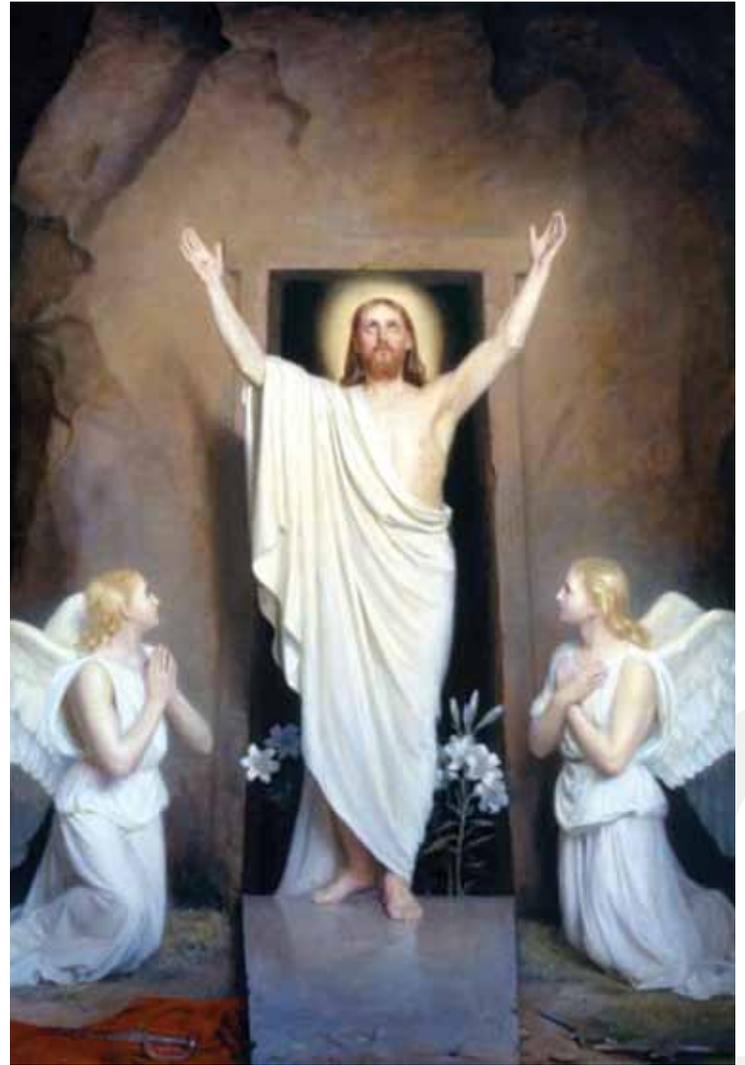
Yet, again, there is still more.

After all, Jesus is not still walking the earth, showing us Himself, is He?

Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus ascended to His Father’s right hand – the feast of which we celebrate on May 9. Ten days later, the Father sent His Spirit, just as Christ promised He would. And with that (the feast we now celebrate as Pentecost), Christ’s salvific mission was accomplished, and it is with the celebration of that great feast that we conclude the Easter season – a season of joyful recognition of the salvation Christ won for us.

Having been beaten and killed for our sins, Christ rose from the dead breaking the bonds of sin. Then, after He ascended to His rightful place in heavenly glory, the Lord sent the Spirit, and now, armed with the power of the Spirit, the Church serves as the sacrament of salvation on Earth – offering us sanctifying grace (a share in the life of Christ Himself) through the sacraments.

As you can see, the Easter season offers us a time to commemorate some of the most important events in the history of salvation. In fact, it can rightly be called the most important season of the Church year, for it is now – during these fifty days



– that we celebrate the fruits of Christ’s sacrifice.

Today, though Christ has won the victory over sin, we are all still living in a tainted world. We still feel the effects of sin, because we do not yet fully partake of the fruits of Christ’s victory. That we will only know when we, by the grace of God, enter eternal glory in the heavenly kingdom.

Let us all take the time this Easter season to thank God for the gift of salvation. Spend time reflecting on how much we have opened our hearts to the grace He pours upon us. May we all be more aware of the glory Christ has won for us, and, in so doing, willingly detach ourselves from the fruits of this world so that we may be more receptive to the fruits of His grace.

USHERS OFFER A WELCOMING PRESENCE TO PARISH COMMUNITY

As one of the oldest lay ministries of the Catholic Church, the ministry of ushers plays an important role in extending a welcome to all who attend Mass. Ever mindful of the words, "When I was a stranger you welcomed me" (Mt. 25:35), ushers not only serve as a representative of the Church, but as a welcoming presence of Christ Himself.

Parishioner Chuck Kilmer serves as usher coordinator along with his wife, Dee. They believe that it is important for an usher to acknowledge everyone — both friends and strangers — with a personal greeting, a smile and some kind words. And because an usher is often the last person a parishioner will see when leaving the church after Mass, it is equally important that the ushers offer a farewell to parishioners once Mass has been dismissed.

"It's important that everyone feels connected and part of the community," says Chuck. "So whether we're greeting people as they come in the door, or wishing them a nice day as they leave, we just want people to know that they are part of the parish."

In addition to fostering an environment of hospitality, an usher performs a variety of other important duties. They hand out the books to parishioners as they enter the church, help people find seats, take up the offertory collection, and do a cursory walk-through after Mass to pick up any books and bulletins that have been left behind in the pews. Chuck says that of all his duties, though, his favorite occurs during Communion.

"The Eucharist is a central part of the Mass," says Chuck. "And as ushers, we make sure everyone has an opportunity to receive Communion. Not only do we maintain a clear flow of traffic, but we keep the Eucharistic Ministers informed of anyone who needs the Eucharist brought to them."

It is also important for the ushers to be ready for the unexpected. Since our ushers are easily identifiable by their badges — blue for the usher captain, white for the rest of the ushers — it goes

without saying that when a problem or issue arises, everyone looks to the ushers for help. Chuck says that ushers are often the "first responders" for when people pass out, if children become ill, or if emergency personnel need to be directed. Indeed, ushers are constantly aware and vigilant because anything can happen at any time.

There are presently around 80 ushers who participate in this ministry, with an average of 10 ushers scheduled for each Sunday Mass. However, given that many ushers take summer vacations, and that there are added Masses during the Christmas and Easter seasons, the ministry is always looking for more volunteers. In order to make it easy for all involved, ushers typically serve at the Mass they would normally attend.



Usher Team for the 7 a.m. Sunday Mass.

Since a large focus of this ministry deals with hospitality — one of the four pillars of stewardship, along with prayer, service and formation — participating in this ministry is an ideal way to get involved in the parish community, as well as to meet and connect with people. Twice a year, Dee organizes a dinner for all the volunteers.

So, who can be an usher?

"Absolutely anyone," Chuck says. "We have had one as young as 9 years old, and one who has been ushering for 60 years. What a volunteer gives is a gift, and so we are happy and grateful to anyone who works in this ministry."

We offer many thanks to our ushers who extend a gift of self and help promote a sense of belonging to all who enter. As the song states, "We are many parts, we are all one body" — and only by extending a welcoming presence of warmth and hospitality can we then become truly united in Christ.

Those interested in receiving more information about volunteering in the Ushers Ministry may contact Chuck Kilmer at ushercoordinator@american-martyrs.org, the parish office at 310-545-5651, or may indicate interest to any of the usher captains at Mass.

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every Mass He is still the Priest and the Lamb of Sacrifice. He is the One who gives us Himself in the Bread and Wine, the Eucharist, not the human priest who just represents Him.

So here goes some of the excuses I hear from my fellow parishioners not fulfilling the obligation of participating in Mass each weekend. I know of a priest who is a pedophile, etc. (extremely challenging for all of us, perhaps the most painful wound we have to bear together). I don't like the priest. I find the homilies (sermons) boring. I don't like the music. I am too busy with sports, work, other activities. I can't get my spouse, my parents, my kids to come with me. It isn't fun for my kids, or they become fussy. All of these "excuses" have become the fodder of Satan to keep us from the Lord's Table.

Of course there are some of us who have a legitimate reason for not being able to participate such as the care of the sick in your family or in your ministry. There are other legitimate reasons but we have to be careful about the technique of the evil one who will bring us to confusion and separation. He tried it with Our Lord, why should he not try with us?

If you ever wish to discuss anything about the Mass and your involvement or non-involvement, know that I am here for you. And let us together give thanks and praise to God for the gift of our faith and for those who raised us in it or brought us to this great inheritance!



LITURGY SCHEDULE

Saturday, 5:00 p.m. | **Sunday**, 7:00 a.m., 8:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 5:00 p.m.

Monday/Wednesday/Friday, 8:00 a.m., 12:10 p.m., 5:00 p.m.

Tuesday/Thursday, 6:30 a.m., 8:00 a.m., 12:10 p.m., 5:00 p.m. | **Saturday**, 8:00 a.m.

Holy Day, 5:00 p.m. (Vigil), 6:30 a.m., 8:00 a.m., 12:10 p.m., 5:00 p.m., 7:30 p.m.