

March 2, 2006

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Wednesday of this past week was Ash Wednesday and a significant day in the life of the church as we began our Lenten journey towards Easter. March 1, however, had an added significance for me because it marked 12 years since the day I came to Concord. Our Lady Parish was my first pastorate and although I was very pleased to have received the assignment, I was also scared. I'd never been a pastor before and I'd never been in a one-priest parish. But I wasn't the only priest in town when I arrived in Concord. Fr. Murray and Fr. O'Brien were just down Route 62 at St. Bernard Parish and both of them welcomed me warmly to my new home.

These 12 years have certainly been the most joyful, rewarding, fulfilling and challenging years of my ministry. There have been many surprises, perhaps even too many surprises. I had hoped I might get an extension of a year over and above my appointed term to be in Concord to preside over the 100th anniversary of the founding of Our Lady's in 2007. I had never dreamed that I would be the pastor who would close her doors in 2004. I had never been inside St. Bernard Church prior to its renovation and I certainly didn't expect that one day its sanctuary would be the place where I would celebrate Mass each weekend. I remember saying some years back that the day would come when there would be only one Roman Catholic priest to serve the Concord community. I never envisioned that I would be the first to fill that role.

Over the past few days some have asked me if I'm glad that I'm still in Concord. And the answer is certainly yes! These are very difficult times in the life of the Catholic Church at large and in particular ways in the Archdiocese of Boston. But in these difficult days I count it a blessing that my ministry is here at Holy Family.

As you know by now, the Archdiocese and the faith community presently worshipping at the Swedenborg Chapel in Sudbury have signed a purchase-and-sale agreement for Our Lady Help of Christians Church. I hope and pray that the Swedenborgians will find there as much peace as did Catholic people for nearly a century. I have not been part of the real estate negotiations and my information comes, like yours, from the media. (The OLHC rectory was sold as a private home before the turn of the new year. And, for the record, the sale of Our Lady's Church does not include the building housing the parish offices. Again, I am grateful to the grass roots group's efforts in helping to insure that this piece of the property remains with Holy Family Parish.

I am grateful to the grass roots group of Concord residents who worked diligently to preserve Our Lady's Church and grounds. While I know that many are pleased that the building will continue to serve as a place of worship, the news this week cannot help but touch some very tender places in the hearts of those for whom Our Lady's Church was a haven of prayer and sacramental life, the sanctuary where they celebrated the most important moments in their lives as Catholics. There have been and there will continue to be many moments when the Catholic people of Concord will be reminded of the

difficult changes which have taken place since we first received word in May 2004 that our parishes would be reconfigured. The sale of Our Lady's Church is such a moment and a very significant one. For each other, for healing, and for the restoration of trust and confidence in the Church, let us pray to the Lord...

The Swedenborgian church bases its teachings on the Bible as illuminated by the works of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), a Swedish scientist and theologian. For more information, visit their website at www.swedenborg.org

A few words about our prayer during Lent... The guidelines for Lenten celebrations indicate that instrumental music should be used sparingly during this season of spiritual austerity: a kind of "fasting" from music... This year we will sing the acclamations (Gospel acclamation; Holy, holy, holy; Memorial acclamation; Great Amen; and Lamb of God) *a cappella*, For those who prefer the instrumentation, remember that Easter is only 40 days away!

Evening Prayer for Lent begins this weekend, Sunday night at 7:00 p.m. About 40 minutes of peace, candlelight, incense, scripture, song and grace... please join us...

Our Generations of Faith sessions for February were reduced from four to three on account of snow, but the program was a great one. Our topic was the Challenge of Peace in the life of Christians. I'm grateful to all our catechetical staff and volunteers and in a special way I want to thank Dan Silva and Andy Sapp for their presentations to the adult and high school breakout groups. Dan and Andy are parishioners recently returned from Iraq and they shared with us their experience and the challenge of peace for Christian men and women who find themselves in the military and at war.

A parishioner asked me to quote again here the several lines from T.S. Eliot's poem *Ash Wednesday* which I used in my homily on Ash Wednesday. Here are those simple lines:

*Teach us to care and not to care.
Teach us to sit still.*

If we spent our Lent asking God to help us to care about things truly worth caring about in our lives, and asking God to help us let go of the things not worthy of our caring, and asking God to help us sit still long enough to ponder these two realities - we might have a very fruitful Lent indeed...

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming