

May 16, 2007

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend marks the 34<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood. When I find it difficult to think of myself as having turned 60, I just remember that I've been a priest for 34 years and then my age seems to make more sense! I mentioned in a letter last month that I was looking forward to retiring at 70 and some have asked me if I'd just stop doing ministry at that point. My answer: no way! All I want to retire from is the responsibility of sitting at the desk where the buck stops (or, more accurately, sitting at the desk where not enough bucks stop!) I look forward to living in a parish and helping out there, at my own pace - minus the burdens and headaches that pastors face these days.

I've written this before, but as long as I only say it once a year I think it bears repeating: I sure didn't know what I was signing up for on May 19, 1973! At the Chrism Mass during Holy Week, the Cardinal spoke of priestly ministry and how, like the lives of married people, the priest on his ordination day knows no more about what the future will bring than does the couple on their wedding day. He told the story of how, when he was the bishop of St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, a terrible hurricane struck the West Indies. The hurricane flattened most of the churches, schools and rectories. The people survived on coconut milk and peanut butter. They were without water, phones or electricity for six months. The Cardinal said that at the time he prayed, "Lord, what can be worse than all this?" Now, he told us, he prays, "Lord, give me a good hurricane any day!" I believe both married people and pastors can understand his sentiments!

A few weeks back I wrote about Sunday Mass and what it means to me and invited your own response to the same question. As so often happens I thought, "Yes! THIS is a question that will get tons of response!" Well, I've put away the bushel baskets in which I was going to sort your comments and settled for a Tupperware container. Here's what I have received and for which I'm most grateful:

- Sunday Mass gives me a PLACE where I belong, even if I don't always feel comfortable... and even when BELONGING feels it's just being a "registered member of the parish." Sunday Mass gives me TIME to spend with God. I spend time with Him during my week, in all sorts of places, at any times: on the T, at work, walking, etc. - but Mass is a special, reserved, set, reliable time that I know I will have with God. Sunday Mass gives me a REASON. This one is kind of very complicated and hard to explain and kind of private. It is something I don't have all the words to explain, but God knows... (from a young woman, single)

- Sunday makes a huge difference in my life. The liturgy and homilies are beautiful each and every week. I so look forward to participating in Mass each Sunday. Today's baptism was beautiful as usual. Welcoming a new child into our Church is the greatest but keeping them growing in the faith is even better. You know I could go on and on but all my comments are over the chart on the positive side so....I'll stop and say it really works for me !! (56, married, active in parish life)

- We travel a half hour to Holy Family Parish where Mass on Sunday makes a huge difference for my husband me. It means the readings that we have heard for some sixty years will come alive--with some new meaning. It means we participate in a well thought out liturgy. We feel we are in a place that is ALIVE----and not just helping us to fulfill an obligation. We sit among young people--

which offers us so much hope for our church in the future. Our hearts and minds are truly put in a special place when we hear the wonderful choir, musicians, cantors... (married for 42 years)

- It is a time for me to analyze my religious life and be inspired to consider new elements every week.

- Sunday Mass makes me feel grounded and part of a vibrant family. When we miss Mass I feel like our week has not been complete. If we attend Mass at a different parish I feel like I've missed seeing the regular attendees, feel out of touch without a bulletin and wonder what the homily was about and I worry that I missed some excellent music! (46 years old, mother of two)

- Attending Mass on Sunday mornings is something I really enjoy. It's a way for me to connect with our church and have a sense of community. It also gives me time to stop and reflect on my week and my life. I think about what I have done - and what I can do better. It's a time to pray for those in need and to thank God for all that I have.

- Sunday Mass: as essential to my wellbeing as any material need... It connects my past to my present, reminds me of thousands of Masses I've attended over my 78 years in many cities, countries, villages: celebratory Masses, Sunday Masses, Lenten Masses. The constant is that beautiful soulful Gregorian chant that continues to hum through my head. I am remembering so much, appreciating those thousands of times when the constant was the support, when the different was the palpable zest, the momentum. Mass "feeds" me with the empowering Spirit that I depend on for my guidance and energy. It nurtures my ponderings as it adds the essential God ingredient: love. It is quiet, comforting, calming: I'm with Him... Holy Family parish is a peaceful haven... (78, married woman)

- Sunday mass is the highlight of my week! I try to come early enough to look at the readings and see what the hymns will be before Mass begins. It also gives me an opportunity to look at the crucifix over the altar and reflect on what Christ did for me by dying on the cross. The beauty of the liturgy and the homilies give me strength for the week ahead. It is a gift that we have, to be able to come gather as a community to celebrate the Mass each week. (a widow)

- Sunday Mass is the ideal way to begin a new week. We look forward to being inspired by the homilies and the liturgy! (74, married)

Not all respondents gave identifying comments and, as promised, signed comments remained anonymous in this space. All the responses were positive although one writer raised questions about how we celebrate First Communion in our parish. In last week's letter I responded to this concern at some length. I edited the comments above but only to avoid duplication and save space here. I hope these responses helped you in your own understanding of what Sunday Mass means to you. And it's still not too late: I'll be happy to continue publish other comments as they come in! *What does Sunday Mass mean in your life?*

Occasionally I've been highlighting the businesses that sponsor our parish bulletin. Although they are on the back of the bulletin every week, they're not to be taken for granted: their support provides the bulletin free of charge to the parish. Although I have no pets, I know that Robert who runs *Dawgz R Me* works wonders with the animals he grooms and cares for. His shop is on

Commonwealth Avenue in West Concord where, as Robert notes in his ad "*your dawg gets treated heavenly!*"

Fr. Jacquineau will be leaving us for some time at home and then a move to Johns Hopkins for further study. His last weekend with us will be on June 3. I am most grateful for his assistance over the last couple of years and I will miss him! Join me in praying for him and in thanking him for his prayerful presence among us.

Sincerely,  
Fr. Fleming