

March 5, 2010

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

This past week I marked my 16th year in Concord: ten and a half years as pastor of Our Lady Help of Christians Parish and over five and a half years as pastor of Holy Family Parish. These have been tumultuous times in the Archdiocese and in our own Catholic community in Concord but I have certainly found these years to be a time of God's grace and peace. In so many ways *YOU* have been the channel of such gifts from God in my life - and for that I am most grateful to you and to the Lord!

It was Cardinal Newman who wrote:

**God's presence is not discerned at the time when it is upon us,
but afterwards when we look back...**

At the risk of contradicting a sage like Cardinal Newman, I'd say that looking back over my 16 years in Concord and more, there *have* been times when I've discerned God's presence right smack-dab in the middle of the here and now. But I agree with him wholeheartedly that in looking back, we often reach a much clearer discernment of how God has been present and moved in our lives, especially through the people in our lives.

It might be a good Lenten exercise for all of us to *look back*, as Cardinal Newman suggests, and look for the presence, the hand of God in our lives in places where we might have missed it the first time around. What does spiritual hindsight reveal to us about the quiet, hidden ways God has moved in our lives? Discovering how God's presence and grace has been with us in the past can often give us hope for the present moment, for the future and for any time when we wonder if God has forgotten or abandoned us. As we sing in the hymn *Amazing Grace*:

**Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.**

As you know from my letters over the past couple of weeks, the Archdiocese of Boston is sponsoring a program in which there will be a priest available for confessions in every church and chapel of the archdiocese on the Wednesday nights of Lent: February 24 and March 3, **10, 17, 24** and **31** from **6:30 - 8:00 p.m.** Our parish is participating in this effort on those dates and at the prescribed time. On most Wednesdays I will be the priest available for confession but on **March 10 Fr. John Murray** will be in the Penance Room and on **March 24, Fr. Michael Medas.**

To assist you, I included in the bulletin two weeks ago an insert with a guide for celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation, with explanatory notes, a refresher on "what to say and do" and, on the reverse side, a guide for examining one's conscience prior to coming to the sacrament. This insert should be helpful to adults and high school students. For those of you who were not here last weekend, copies of this insert are next to the bulletins and will be available in church on the Wednesday nights of Lent. A similar guide, suitable for younger children, will be available in the same way. And of course, in addition to these special times, confessions will also be heard at the regular time on Saturday afternoons from 4:00 - 4:30 p.m.

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming