

January 7, 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It's not until this weekend that the Christmas season, on the Church calendar, comes to a close with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. I want to thank all those who helped make our celebrations of Advent and Christmas so beautiful.

To our ministers of Word and Eucharist who brought the Scriptures and Sacrament to us through Advent and Christmas and our ushers who welcomed our Christmas worshippers go our heartfelt thanks. +++ To our **music ministry** for the ways they lead us and grace us with sacred song - our music director, the choirs (younger and older, choral and bell) and their directors, our cantors and instrumentalists - go our heartfelt thanks. +++ To those who worked to bring the **Turkey Truck, the Giving Trees, the Prison Gift project and the baskets for food** to our church doors and to those who responded so generously to these efforts go our heartfelt thanks. +++ To those who organized and shared in our **workshop for those who grieve** during the **holidays go our heartfelt thanks. +++ To those who organized our parish trip to the Boston POPS Christmas concert** go our heartfelt thanks. +++ To our **ministers to the homebound** who bring a visit, a prayer and the Eucharist to so many every week and whose visits are especially a gift at this time of the year, and to our **Cookie and Carols brigade** who brought joy to so many go our heartfelt thanks. +++ To all who prepared and made of our **Children's Christmas Pageant** such a wonderful proclamation of the Christmas story in song, sight, story and humor - go our heartfelt thanks. +++ To those who regularly bring **meals to the homeless in Boston** and whose service means so much to those who have so little, especially at this time of the year when those in comfort are so busy about so many things - to these young people and the adults who organize their mission and drive and chaperone them go our heartfelt thanks. +++ To those who **prepare the church, the sanctuary and the altar** for our prayer, especially at this time of year when the beauty of the environment for our prayer and the number of services make extra demands - go our heartfelt thanks. +++ To those who counted our Christmas Collection for the benefit of our sick and retired priests go our heartfelt thanks. +++ To those who **prepared our nativity scenes** (and who will pack them away this week) go our heartfelt thanks for bringing to our eyes such beautiful reminders of Christ's birth. And a special thanks to those who, at the last minute, stepped forward to insure that our **crèche outside Monument Hall** would be there for all who pass through the Square to see. +++ To our young people and the adults working with them on this coming weekend's **Christmas Tree PickUp** to help subsidize our youth summer service trips go our heartfelt thanks. +++ And to our wonderful Friday afternoon **bulletin stuffers** who helped bring you news of so many seasonal events in our parish go our heartfelt thanks! +++ Please keep in mind that those who served us in these ways did so at just the time of the year when we all find ourselves especially busy about many things. I'm especially grateful that when things are so rushed there are those who still make time to serve our parish in special ways.

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In a few weeks the leadership of our parish staff, councils and committees will be meeting to look to the future together. Part of our work will be to work on a parish mission statement. You might remember that in October when we were marking the 6th anniversary of Holy Family Parish, I wrote the following:

In our six-year history we've not yet worked on a mission statement for our parish but on this anniversary weekend it seems to me that's something we should consider doing. A mission statement gives a parish a way to understand itself and helps to shape the direction it takes and the decisions it makes. Based on our past six years and drawing on the combined nearly 250 years of our parishes of origin, I'd offer this as a statement of the mission I see developing in our parish life:

*We, the people of Holy Family Parish,
are called by God to a shared life
as a Catholic Christian community:
rooted in Scripture and Tradition;
nourished and celebrated in prayer, especially the Sacraments;
and committed to preaching the Gospel and serving those in need.*

Yes, that's a simple statement and it may appear to state only what's obvious. But it's often the case that we need to continually affirm what we know lest we become distracted by concerns outside our core mission.

Especially because our parish life is vibrant, we need to look ahead and begin to plan for the future and how Holy Family Parish will be the Catholic community in Concord in 2016, 2021, 2026... It's no longer enough simply to live, year to year, doing what we've always done! As you'll read below, the challenges ahead are many and we need to be prepared to face them.

Shifts in church life are likely to be our future for some time and how our parish navigates those changes will be critical for our life as God's people in Concord, a parish in the Archdiocese of Boston. We will need to have a common vision against which we can measure change and challenge and prepare for what is ahead for us.

I'll be writing about this for the next several weeks and I ask you to keep this in your prayer.

Not unrelated to just the work of the parish leadership retreat day is a program the Archdiocese of Boston is about to inaugurate. I've written about it here before: *Catholics Come Home*. Recent statistics reveal that only about 17% of Catholics in the Archdiocese of Boston regularly attend Mass on Sundays. 17%... That means, of course, that over 80% of our Catholic brothers and sisters are not with us in prayer at Mass on the Lord's Day.

Catholics Come Home is meant to be a *first step* in reaching out to those who have drifted away from the prayer and life of parish communities. If you were with us for one of our Christmas liturgies, you'll remember my drawing your attention to a flyer in the pews and at the doors of the church, particularly intended for those who "came home to church" for Christmas but who aren't with us on most Sundays.

To kick off this program, Cardinal Sean has taped a homily for the weekend of January 23 and has asked all parishes to play and use this at all Masses. Several times a year pastors receive audio cassettes and videos we're asked to use at Mass, most often for fundraising purposes. I've never used any of these but this time, after some very helpful consultation with the parish Staff, Parish Council and others I've decided to use the video. I'm doing this because I believe this is a very important work the Cardinal is calling us to and I want us to hear that call from him and in his own words.

There will be a special collection on that Sunday to help fund radio and television spots inviting *Catholics to Come Home*. Although the media outreach will be great, I believe the most effective effort will be what you and I offer, individually to Catholics we know who have drifted away from parish life in our own families, friendship circles, at work and in our community. Together with the archdiocese our parish will be working to invite and welcome home those who have been away and in that work YOU may be the very person through whom others return to the prayer and life of our parish.

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming