

October 19, 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The sign outside of First Parish Church in Concord notes that First Parish was “gathered in 1636.” This week we celebrate an anniversary of our own *gathering*, even if our history doesn’t stretch as far back as our Unitarian friends across the street. It was four years ago, on the weekend of October 23 and 24, 2004, that the Catholic community of Concord first “gathered” as Holy Family Parish. Of course, Catholics in Concord had long been gathered for a long time as St. Bernard Parish (founded 1863) and Our Lady Help of Christians Parish (founded 1907) but four years ago a new *gathering* was begun and its anniversary is worthy of our attention.

Many parishioners have worked with diligence and devotion to lay a firm foundation for Holy Family Parish with the guidance and support of the Parish Staff, the Parish Pastoral and Finance Councils, the Ministries of Word, Sacrament, Worship and Music, and the many Commissions and Committees upon whom we all rely for the vitality of parish life. Four years is not such a long time but when I think back to some of my own fears and concerns as I was assigned as Holy Family’s first pastor, I realize that with the help of God we have come a long way and indeed have built for the Lord a temple of living stones in the faith filled people who make up the family of Holy Family Parish.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

A great sign of parish life is what’s happening in our **ARISE** faith sharing groups! Here are quotes from just some of the email I’ve received (none of which included even one negative comment!):

- *What a fantastic evening! We have a diverse group and everyone felt comfortable participating. The evening flew and we ended up staying an extra 10 minutes, but easily could have continued for another 30. I am already sad that there are only 5 more meetings left! This is an amazing program and I would encourage everyone on the Leadership Team to continue to talk it up with parish members.*
- *Our group met with about 1/2 of our members this time, but the 2nd meeting everyone should be there. It was great ... connecting, sharing, and encouraging. I am excited for the week to come!*
- *We have a wonderful group of people, and had a thoughtful meditation on the gospel reading for this Sunday and a lively exchange with various interpretations and opinions. We thought about how this lesson should affect our lives. Everyone listened respectfully and spoke honestly.*
- *We found that we were all looking for more info on interpreting the gospel, despite our best, very open efforts at sharing our thoughts and experiences. So I remembered a big Bible we have with footnotes, which we consulted and found that we were mostly on track!*
- *Our Thursday evening ARISE session went very well. Our group was diverse, engaged in the process, and very supportive of one another. All found the Gospel parable to have a somewhat puzzling ending; and some of us needed to ponder the personal action selection as a "homework" task. With the opportunity to review the printed material prior to next week's session, we will probably find this activity easier.*
- *Personally, I found the readings at Mass this weekend more meaningful and Father Fleming's homily even more helpful after having our discussion on Thursday.*

• *I thought our first meeting was great, each of us kind of feeling our way but willing to share our thoughts, feelings and experiences. We were all trying very hard to understand the reading - so everyone laughed at the next meeting about Fr. Fleming's "IT'S A PARABLE!" in his homily on the weekend. Our second meeting was great! The comfort level had increased and I think everyone was able to sink into the reading a little more. I thought the discussion was lively and interesting and I'm already looking forward to next week! Everyone definitely felt more engaged at church - we all really wanted to know what direction the homily might take.*

Once again: praise God from whom all blessings flow!

As you may know, there are "34 Sundays in Ordinary Time" on the church calendar and this weekend was the 29th! That means that Advent and (gulp!) Christmas are around the corner! Prior to Advent there are two important feasts on the liturgical calendar: the feast of All Saints on November 1 and the feast of All Souls on November 2. This year, because All Saints falls on a Saturday, it is not observed as a day of obligation to attend Mass. This also means that All Souls Day (never a day of obligation) falls on a Sunday. It's importance trumps the prayers and readings of a Sunday in Ordinary Time and so on that weekend we'll be celebrating All Souls Day at the Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning liturgies. The official name for this day is the *Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed*. It's a day on which we pray for those who have died, entrusting them to the eternal and merciful peace of God in heaven. Sometimes November is called the "Month of All Souls," indicating a month in which we especially pray for those who have died.

At the Masses on the weekend of All Souls, we will remember by name, in the Prayers of the Faithful, all those who have been buried from Holy Family Parish in the year since last All Souls Day.

Because this is a time for praying for and *remembering* those who have died, we invite you to bring photographs of departed family members and friends (regardless of their date of death) and to post them on several large boards for that purpose in the Gathering Room, where they will remain for the month of November. (I suggest you mark the photographs with your name and address on the back and pin them to the board with an envelope behind. This will provide the best way to insure that your photographs are secure and you can retrieve them at the end of the month.) It will be the responsibility of families and individuals to pin the photos to the boards and to remove them at the end of the month.

Our liturgies on All Souls weekend will use the prayers and readings of that feast and we will look at what the Church teaches about *those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith...* **NOW** is the time to begin to look for those photographs! Beginning on this coming weekend, October 25th and 26th, the boards will be available in the Gathering Room.

And this very weekend... Do you remember the short song we learned and sang at the Faith Festivals two weeks ago? *If you believe and I believe and we together pray - the Holy Spirit will come down and set God's people free!* I found that song through the music of the Iona Community from Scotland. John Bell is a principal music minister with Iona and will be at West Concord Union Church Saturday evening (October 18 at 7:30 p.m.), speaking on *Things Unsaid and Unsung of Jesus*. He will also preach at West Concord Union's 9:45 a.m. service on Sunday morning, October 19.

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming