

February 24, 2011

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

On Tuesday of this week, March 1, I will have been in Concord for 17 years. These have been 17 of the happiest years of my life and I thank God and I thank all of you for the joy these years have given me. Those same years have not been without difficult days and seasons of sorrow for each of us and for all of us together as Catholics but our faith in God's grace and the Lord's fidelity to us has bound us as one in good times and in bad.

As I look ahead to the beginning of *Catholics Come Home*, the archdiocesan effort to invite and welcome home those Catholics who have been away from the life and worship of their parishes, I am pleased that Holy Family Parish is a community of faith with doors already open to all. I'm pleased that anyone coming home to Holy Family will find here a warm welcome, beautiful liturgy, fine faith formation and many opportunities to reach out to those in need locally and around the world. Together with you and the leadership of our parish on the staff and in our councils, commissions, committees and various ministries, we have, with the Lord's help, shaped a parish community which is indeed one, Holy Family of God's people.

As I've written and preached over the last couple of months, *Catholics Come Home* will include messages from the Church on television, radio and in print media. Those ads will send out the word to all and our parish will be ready to welcome home those who return. But there's a critically important step between the ads and the folks' return, and that involves you who are reading this letter. An ad on the radio will catch the attention of many but you have an important role to play when those who know you're Catholic and know that you're already "home," ask you what this is all about or, more pointedly, why you continue to be a Church going Catholic. You don't need to be a theologian or catechist to respond to such questions. But it might help if you begin now to ponder a few questions yourself to help you prepare for when others may engage you in conversation. What questions? How about these...

- How is my faith in God important to me in my daily life? • How does my faith comfort me?
- How does my faith challenge me? • How is prayer part of my life? • What brings me to Mass on Sunday? • What do I find in Sunday worship that I don't find in other places? • What difference does Sunday Mass make in my week? • What comfort does Sunday Mass bring me? How does it challenge me? • Was there recently at Sunday Mass a song, a scripture reading, a prayer, a homily, a sacramental celebration that helped me in my life as a Catholic Christian? • How is the presence of others at Mass (friends, family, neighbors, strangers) important to me?

Questions like those might help you bring to mind and articulate how your faith and your participation in Sunday worship make a difference in your life. Should others speak to you or ask you questions, the first thing to do is listen. Like you, others may have questions, concerns, disappointments and disagreements regarding faith and the life of the Church. Listening is important - and it's probably *more* important than "having all the answers." The best response you can make to others' concerns and questions is to respond from your own faith experience: the person you're speaking with wants to know what you think and why you still come to church. And invite the person to come with you to some event in parish life: that might be Mass, it might be another parish activity. In Lent we'll be having a St. Patrick's Day dinner and a concert of blue grass music and Sunday afternoon "listening sessions" -- there are many doors into the life of our parish!

More on this next week...

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming