

ONE HUNDRED SIXTY EIGHT HOURS A WEEK

Early last week a call came in to the Rectory. A Hospice nurse assigned to a Catholic in our area was asking, on behalf of his patient, that a priest visit and give him the anointing of the sick. On Thursday afternoon I went to the man's apartment and met him. He was around my age but had some major health issues including a cancer that was untreatable. He was on hospice and he knew it. He was on oxygen and let's just say he had not been able to tidy up before I arrived. As he said, "Excuse my mess, Father."

He was anxious to go to confession. He told me it had been a long time, forty-five years, but he was still Catholic. He had gone to Catholic grade school and high school. He had been an altar boy once upon a time. But as he grew up he and the faith were not on close terms for a lot of his life but he always knew he was Catholic. So I heard his confession and then I anointed him after explaining what I was going to do and how the anointing worked. After I was finished he was so excited. He had referred to himself several times as a "lapsed Catholic." I told him that he was not going to be able to refer to himself like that anymore because he was back now, forgiven, anointed. In God's good graces. He said, "I feel so good. I want to call my sister. She works for a parish in the city." So he took out his flip phone and hit her number and as soon as he said hello he handed the phone to me. I said hello and introduced myself. His sister hadn't quite understood what was going on or who I was, so I explained all that had happened. I told her that her brother wanted her to know he was okay. I said to her, "You know I am here today because you have been praying for your brother all these years." She said, "Yes, but really our mother who just died. She was the one who prayed so long for him. She just died a few months back."

A mother's answered prayers. I never met her. Knew nothing about her except that she never stopped praying for her son and now here I was making sure he was right with God before the Lord called him home. It sounded a little like the story of the father of the prodigal son in today's gospel. That father and this mother both prayed for their children. They kept believing. They kept looking. They kept praying. They kept hoping. The father lived to see his son returned but the mother went to her grave not seeing. But her prayer WAS answered and from her perch in the kingdom of God she knows that now. God does answer our prayers. Maybe she was tempted to think what difference does it make? But, my friends, what we do, what we think, how we act, why we pray—all these things do matter. They matter deeply.

She had tried to raise her kids the right way. They got older and they made their own decision or they let things pass them by. That is the way of things in this life. But we must not give up. We must continue to do and continue to give and continue to pray even when we have a lot on our plates. And for many of us there is a lot on our plates. More than we care to have there but again, such is life. But today I want you to take a little time and ask yourself if all the stuff on your plate is the right stuff? Is it the best stuff? The things your family has going on, the activities your kids are involved in—is it the right stuff? Is it too much stuff? Is there something missing from your plate that you may have pushed over onto the back burner because you can't accommodate everything right now?

This Sunday is a day for us to step back and take the time to re-assess. Are your priorities in the right order? Is God really in the picture? In the correct place in your family's life—or has

the Lord been pushed back from his proper place? The three parables that Jesus told that we heard in the gospel are all about losing things—a sheep, some money, a son. Today Jesus would tell of losing a Smartphone, a Paycheck, and a child. How is your relationship with Our Lord doing? That is a question pastors must ask their people. Is it strong and sturdy? Is it drifting? Has it been displaced by other things in your life or your family's life? Do you sense that you don't really know enough about your faith? Saint Anthony's is offering again a series called Discovering Christ. It could as easily be called Re-discovering Christ. It runs for seven Monday nights. There is food. A video. Some sharing with others about what the video was about. It is designed to help us re-connect. It begins on Monday night September 26th. In the new year we will offer the next phase of that program which is called Following Christ. Having rediscovered our relationship with the Lord we then look at what it looks like, what does it mean in practical terms. And the final seven-week program is called Sharing Christ. Because we don't want to keep to ourselves something that has come to mean so much to us. Consider signing up for Discovering Christ.

In the Narthex today you will see tables set up and on them is information about the various ministries and activities that are underway here at Saint Anthony's. Staff is involved in many of these but it is you, the parishioners, who make them happen. You give of your time and your make the sacrifices or these things do not take place. We still need a couple of you to sign up to teach our Catholic faith in our CFF program, 3rd grade and fifth grade. Please give that some thought.

Perhaps you are someone who could help us with our buildings and our grounds. We have a Commission which meets once a month. Please consider signing up. Or if you are interested in the quality of our worship and would like to help us there is a Commission for Worship that could use your assistance. There are Commissions for Youth and Family. Do you believe there is more we could be doing as a parish for our children, then we ask you to help us out by volunteering. There is a Commission on Adult Faith and Evangelization. How do we reach out within our own parish community inviting young families to "come and see" what the Lord desires to give to them. Perhaps you like the planning and hospitality side of things. We have a Commission for Hospitality and Parish events which is responsible for such things. And then there is Stewardship and Advancement which identifies projects for our Jubilee Fund and seeks effective ways that the message of Our Lord with which we have been entrusted is communicated as effectively as possible.

I know that you get my drift. The last thing I want to emphasize is that we are going to work at developing a group of Prayer Warriors whose job it will be just to pray—for specific persons and for specific intentions. You don't have to go anywhere to do that. You can pray wherever you are throughout the day but we want to make this a reality. So I am asking you to do some thinking about what is going on in your life and in that of your family members. I am asking for you to give some of your time to the parish for yourself or for others. As a parish we have been at this for 130 years but so much has changed. If we do not renew our own efforts and if we do not recommit ourselves to do whatever it takes to live our Catholic faith and to hand it on then our parish will die.

You know, the Israelites lost their way in their travels after they left Egypt and they ended up worshipping a Golden Calf. They didn't intend to do that but that's what happened. That IS what happens if we do not renew ourselves from time to time and re-establish our faith priorities and our spiritual priorities. We have to make sure that we put Our Lord first and then

make decisions that keep Him there day in and day out. If we do then we will not lose our way and we can be confident that there will always be someone praying for us so that none of us is lost in the end.