

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many volunteers who came together this past Saturday to erect the canopy generously loaned by the St. Pius Men's Club. I wish to acknowledge by name those who donated their time for this very important endeavor. Their generosity and witness to service is another building block in the foundation that makes our parish community so alive, vibrant and thriving even in these difficult times of an international pandemic. I was very pleased to see that there were volunteers representing all aspects of parish life from teenagers to young fathers to longtime members of our parish family. I cannot overestimate how coming together in this way is bringing so much hope to our parishioners. It is another confirmation that the Holy Spirit is truly alive and operative. I am somewhat embarrassed that I was not present; as an Assistant Vocation Director, I concelebrated the transitional diaconate ordination of Rev. Mr. Nicholas Case. Nic Case is studying for the Archdiocese of San Francisco at the North American College in Rome. The ordination was held at St. Raphael's Church in San Rafael, where Fr. Kyle Faller is Parochial Vicar. Fr. Kyle extends his greetings to all of our parish and I assured him that he is sorely missed here by all of us!

I continue to feel enormously blessed by all the positive energy and support being rendered by many parishioners during this time. We continue to improve our infrastructure with the raising of the lights in the church and our Environment Committee is near completion with its project of donning our sanctuary with the statues of the Holy Family which are currently in the Candle Room. This is the culmination of a project which began last year and I am grateful for the many hours of planning and execution that went into this beautification of our sacred space. In this and innumerable ways we continue to reflect in a sure and steady manner the priorities which unite us as a Catholic, Christian community: prayer, reception of the sacraments, service and volunteer opportunities to sustain and build up our capacity to serve our parish community.

Last Thursday, we had a wonderful Funeral Mass for our longtime and much-beloved parishioner Pam Nehrenz. Her husband Tom, children Matt and Katie, and devoted friends Patti Fama and Joe Fava gathered to honor this woman who exercised both courage and hope during her illness. Fr. Andrew Ginter, chaplain of Marin Catholic High School and Assistant Vocation Director (Marin County) and chaplain of the Knights of Malta, concelebrated the Mass. As we know, through the support of Joe and Susan Krauss (members of the Knights of Malta), Pam and Tom were able to journey to Lourdes in May of 2019 for a time of prayer and healing. This experience deeply impacted Pam and I believe this experience gave her the grace to face her final illness with dignity and Christian surrender. Pam's Funeral Mass, celebrated on Thursday, August 27, is also the Feast of St. Monica.

In the Office of Readings for this feast day, there is a reflection by St. Augustine, the son of St. Monica and whose feast day we celebrate on August 29th. I shared a part of this essay in my funeral homily and I would like to share it with you. It offers hope amidst sadness and is an edifying way to contemplate the mystery of life and death. We can come to see within this seeming dichotomy the majesty of God's glory and the hope that comes from dying to self, both spiritually, emotionally, and physically in the ultimate sense, thereby sharing in the gift of eternal life.

“The day was now approaching when my mother Monica would depart from this life; you know that day, Lord, though we did not. She and I happened to be standing by ourselves at a window that overlooks the garden in the courtyard of the house. At the time we were in Ostia on the Tiber. We had gone there after a long and wearisome journey to get away from the noisy crowd, and to rest and prepare for our sea voyage. I believe that you, Lord, caused all this to happen in your own mysterious ways. And so the two of us, all alone, were enjoying a very pleasant conversation, *forgetting the past and pushing on to what is ahead*. We were asking one another in the presence of the Truth - for you are the Truth - what it would be like to share the eternal life enjoyed by the St.s, which *eye has not seen, nor ear heard, which has not even entered into the heart of man*. We desired with all our hearts to drink from the streams of your heavenly fountain, the fountain of life.”

Reflecting on the words of St. Augustine is so fitting in light of today's Gospel reading. Augustine had been a very prominent speaker and rhetorician. He would hold crowds spellbound as he spoke on philosophical themes. He was also known to be quite vain and self-absorbed. His mother, who herself had converted to Catholic Christianity, wanted this same gift for her son. This prayer seems to elude her for some time; she would cry in prayer but never lost heart nor hope. Alas, her plea was answered and Augustine, under the tutelage of St. Ambrose, then Bishop of Milan, converted to the faith, became a priest, and ultimately Bishop of Hippo. Augustine spent many years in a state of life contrary to the Christian call to love and serve neighbor and to seek and render forgiveness and reconciliation. Yet, as in all things that come from God, this great St. was used as an instrument to illuminate the Gospel. We learn that fraternal correction, that is, to help another acknowledge his or her mistakes or shortcomings, must be done in a spirit of love and charity.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus offers manners in which to exercise fraternal correction: one on one with the person himself; if that proves to be ineffective, bring a witness to try to bring resolution; and, if that tact does not work, bring the matter before the leaders of the Church. In all of this, however, love and charity must predominate. It is in this truth that we experience the fruits of Christian charity, and we come to know in a real and tangible way the words of Jesus to his disciples: “...if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted them by my heavenly Father. For where two or more are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them!”

As we celebrate Labor Day as a national community, let us take some time to remember and pray for all those women and men who toil and work in order to ensure the blessings we enjoy in our society. Let us be mindful of those who struggle to support themselves and their families, and that we continue to work and strive towards honoring the dignity and right to work for all!

Fr. Tom