

Living the Spirit Conversation

In this summer season I find myself less able to write new and thoughtful inserts for the bulletin. I have decided to simply write about anything that may be on my mind and share it with you. I hope it makes for easy reading.

A few weeks ago I made my annual retreat. This is an obligation for priests as far as the law and custom allows. I like to go to St. Francis Retreat House. It is a familiar place. While the place of the retreat does not matter much, I have always found St. Francis Retreat House to be a welcoming place for contemplation, prayer, and even fellowship with my colleagues.

The main chapel there is called the Stigmata Chapel. One can view a huge mosaic of St. Francis in three depictions of his life. The largest and central image shows St. Francis receiving the Stigmata, the wounds of Christ in his body. I always think of his sufferings so readily shared completely with those of the Crucified Christ. Many meditations follow from it. How can one's own sufferings – of any kind – seem so disconnected with the Lord's plan for one's salvation? I never felt any healing from my meditations, but I did find reality. Not a bad spiritual gift.

On the left side there is depicted the event when St. Francis originated the Christmas crib, manger or crèche. He placed a living baby in the manger, depicted as Christ in the mosaic. I have always wanted to be a "Christmas" person. It is one of those times of the year when I like to be more fully human in the best sense of the word. I also feel it is a time when all of us can receive Christ into our very being, if only we let Him come to us. Does He not become Emmanuel for us – God with us? Imagine having this meditation in June – another plus on retreat!

On the right side we see St. Francis kneeling, as a priest goes by accompanied by an angel, carrying the Blessed Sacrament, no doubt to the sick. My meditation here usually centers on what my priestly mission is and has been. Am I that priest? I wonder how any others might focus on St. Francis. It would be a great reminder that the Eucharist deserves our adoration and our respect. Recall how I have quoted in the past that "adoration puts God in His place and us in ours." Oh that there would be more reverence in our church, where Jesus is present always – Body, Blood Soul and Divinity! Oh that I would never forget His presence in my work and life and not just at Mass.

Retreat means a spiritual adventure. One never knows what may come of the hours spent away from common cares and concerns. I have found it a spiritual grace to be with my fellow priests. In these days when I cannot pick up a newspaper without feeling terrible about what it may contain about priests, I think of those with me who are working so hard and doing so much good. Each year they seem to get older. But their spirit of happiness breaks out at times and makes life beautiful for me. [As an aside I was the oldest priest on retreat this year. Imagine what thoughts I might have had!]

I hope that sometime in your life you may have the chance to have a really good retreat away from all your daily cares and somehow alone with God. Perhaps you would find it to be spiritually worthwhile, and perhaps a foretaste of greater things to come.

Let me turn to another subject on my mind. Naturally I am thinking these days about what retirement means to a priest. I know and live in that stage of life. It seems the Church is still trying to find away to give order to what the life of a retired priest should be. As a seminarian the picture of the priest was given as the one “dying with his boots on.” There was no retirement. Indeed in some very spiritual ways that is still true. It is all the trappings of ordinary life that have to be let go.

I cannot but thank all of you who so generously provide support for our priests by your gifts to the Bishop’s Annual Appeal. I am sure that I am not alone in my thanks. I happen to think that this is the Lord’s way of fulfilling His promise to his disciples – tenfold in this life. So, know you may be receiving thanks from One whom you may never have thought you would.

Another theme. I recall how one day one of my students asked a question. He asked if priests were afraid to die. I gave the answer that priests were no different from others. For myself there is some small fear of death, for simply put, it is an unknown. Yet, I think most fear dying -- that is the active process of death. Spiritually, a true Christian can rely on faith. It diminishes fear. It opens the vision of a life to come. Yes, unknown but still revealed as wonderful. The Scripture says that it has not even entered into the mind of man to know what things God has prepared for those who love Him. So, here’s another piece of advice – love God! Love Him in His commandments. Love him in the Wisdom he has given you in the teachings of the Church. Love Him in others! Love can cast out fear!

Summer. There are two inserts on the parish website about this theme. As summer progresses I hope you manage to have at least a short time on vacation to think of the spiritual life you have. I am always happy to know how some visit a different parish for Mass and there find the community to be found everywhere in the Church. My prayer for all of you, especially for the children, is that this time be a time of happiness, joy and safety, and even of abundant grace.

A reminder: we are still observing the Year of Mercy. Have you visited our Cathedral and walked through its Holy Door? If so, remember you must fulfill the conditions: confession, Communion, and prayers for the Holy Father and his intentions. [You can find information about a plenary indulgence from the internet. I did!]

Lord, have mercy! Christ, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!

God love you always!
Monsignor Morrison