

Fr. Luan Tran

Weekly Bulletin Notes

2019

January 6, 2019: My Dear Parishioners

2019 is here, finally! Not that I was eager for it to come this quickly! New Year, new resolutions? May I suggest that you include a new prayer routine in your daily life in this new year of 2019? Perhaps you have been praying daily already. Perhaps you have been wanting to devote more time to daily prayers. Perhaps you haven't had time . . . whatever the situation you are in, please consider a renewed effort to pray daily in this new year! Daily prayers are necessary for the soul in the way oxygen is for the lungs. We may be going to Sunday Mass faithfully, but without daily prayers the graces we have received in the Sacraments do not have chance to grow, to blossom, to produce fruits in our lives. Daily prayers are critical for spiritual growth and spiritual growth is nothing other than a deepening of our friendship with our Blessed Lord!

I am looking at various options for a prayer book to recommend to you. And please remember, the family that prays together, stays together!

Have a Blessed New Year!

January 13, 2019: My Dear Parishioners

This weekend Tom McClung speaks to you about the last phase of the restoration project that was started by Father Nathan several years ago. It was a critical project to save the church building from literally disintegrating because of its age and the material from which it was constructed almost one hundred years ago. The total cost of this last phase of the project is about \$275,000, including the re-sealing of the exterior parts that have already been restored.

I always loathe to speak on the subject of money, but this is not about money. This whole project has always been about preserving a unique architectural accomplishment that has lasted almost 100 years - a unique structure that is more than just a building because it has been the church in which the worship of God has been carried out for almost a century. This church building that is St. Agatha's is a monument to the faith of the early generations of Catholics who had settled in this part of the city and who went to extraordinary lengths to build a beautiful edifice to serve as the house of God for themselves and for their children. Now it is up to us to keep up and maintain their legacy. Because this is our legacy!

Thank you and God bless you!

January 20, 2019: My Dear Parishioners,

I have been having the privilege to co-teach one period of religion to the Eighth Graders with Mr. Arnaud Prevot (on three Thursdays of the month). And it has been a tremendous joy to be able to help our young people in their journey of faith to discover the beauty and the profundity and the joy that the truths of the Catholic Faith bring to their lives. I have heard from them their biggest concerns, and I have begun to have a slightly better appreciation of the life of young people in these times. Young as they are and busy as they are, they have not neglected the deepest questions of the heart. And in spite of many distractions around them, these young Catholics have paid attention to the yearnings of their hearts and endeavored to pursue the answers to these most significant desires. I am very proud of our school and our children. But I am also aware of the

snare and the dangers awaiting them on the road of life as they prepare for the next step. In the end, we entrusted them to God's protection and the Blessed Mother's maternal solicitude and St. Agatha's intercession! FLT

January 27, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Today there is an article in the bulletin by Tom McClung summarizing what is being asked of you for St. Agatha's Preservation project. Please take some time and reflect on what you could do. And please pray about everything. I know you are under constant pressure to give to this cause or for that. This is not a cause, because it is about preserving the spiritual home of all of us.

Please ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten your heart and your mind so that you may confidently decide! In the end, I entrust this whole endeavor into the hands of the Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, and St. Agatha. God bless you! FLT

February 3, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

We are looking for potential adorers who would sign up to keep watch with our Eucharistic Lord in the Adoration Chapel. The benefits of an hour with the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament are beyond measure. Just ask one of the veteran adorers such as Emma Bosco or Elizabeth Meyer! Lately, some regulars are no longer able to fulfill their commitments due to illness and age-related problems. Their hearts ache to be here but their bodies cannot comply! That is where you would come in!

Please look at your schedule and ask yourselves if you could find an hour a week to keep watch with the Lord, to keep company with Him, to seek His consolation, at the Adoration Chapel. May God inspire you to say YES!

February 10 & February 17, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Our parish along with all the parishes of the Archdiocese of Portland will take up a special collection for the Archbishop's Catholic Appeal at all the Masses of the last weekend of this month, February 23-24. This Appeal is very crucial for funding's for the Retired Priests and for the Education and Formation of Seminarians. By participating in this Appeal, you and I (Yes, I am also contributing this this Appeal!) are making a statement! We will not abandon our elderly priests who have given their lives in service to the Church in Western Oregon. At the same time, we also keep our eyes fixed on the future by assisting with the cost of educating our Seminarians. You have been asked to help with many things and causes and programs - all worthwhile, including our Preservation Project! But please look interiorly and pray, so that your hearts may also have affection for these two groups of people: the Retired Priests and the Future Priests! Please say YES to the Archbishop's Appeal, so that our Shepherd, Archbishop Sample, may have the resources to take care of those have given their whole life to God in serving you and those who are embarking on the journey toward the same ministry of priestly service in the future.

Please do what you can to help me reach the goal of raising \$27,612 for this year's Appeal. Your prayers are critically needed if we want to succeed in this worthy endeavor and any other worthy endeavors! As for me, I shall leave the success of this Appeal in the hands of the Blessed Mother! May God bless you and reward you abundantly!

February 24 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

This weekend we take up our pledges for the Archbishop's Catholic Appeal and send them on to the Archdiocese. I am not sure if I have convinced you of the worthiness of this appeal, but I have done my best and leave the rest in God's hand! For me, it's simple: we have an opportunity to show our gratitude to those priests who had served us faithfully, and we help secure our future for our children! Gratitude and loyalty to the past help pave the way for confidence and trust in the future!

Our goal is around \$27,000. Please look into your hearts and see what you could do to help! Please also pray for our effort in this regard! It matters if you participate. Any amount is appreciated, but the Archbishop is also asking for your participation. As your priest, I am grateful that you would consider!

March 3 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

This coming week we celebrate an important monument of the Liturgical Year: Ash Wednesday. Please make time to attend Mass if you can on this day - the beginning of the penitential season leading to Easter Sunday. I would like to propose something for your spiritual plan for Lent: before you decide to do anything extra or to give up something, please consider having more silence in your life! We are surrounded by all kinds of noises that are not conducive to a healthy life - mentally, physically, and spiritually. The Psalms insist on having silence as part of our spiritual endeavors - "Be still and know that I am God!" Only in the stillness of the heart can we begin to listen to God's whisper! Before anything else, please observe silence - in the home, in the car, waiting in line! Use every opportunity you have to be still, quiet, reflective, so that you become more and more in tune with the supernatural, so that you become trained and be able to recognize what it is that God is saying to you, here and now, for your life!

March 10 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

The Lenten regimen is built upon the three pillars of prayers, fasting, and almsgiving. Fr. Larry Richards, nationally-famed Catholic priest and great spiritual author and speaker, has suggested a useful way to manage the Lenten discipline to his people. I am going to pass it on to you! For each of the three Lenten practices - prayers, fasting, and almsgiving - ask the Lord for guidance on what to do in each category. List different activities for each of the three categories and pick one of each with the help of the Holy Spirit! Don't expect too much. Don't settle for the minimal. Just ask the Holy Spirit to move your heart to one particular activity in each category - prayers, fasting, and almsgiving - and run with it!

Remember how many Lents have come and gone, and ask yourselves if you have changed at all for the better? May this Lent witness your progress in the spiritual life towards greater love of God and neighbor!

March 17 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

I am excited about a new opportunity for our families at St. Agatha! I am proposing to start the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, now that we have families with younger children (preschoolers and kindergarteners) who are looking for help to pass on the faith to their youngsters. It just happened that a friend of mine of many years who is an experienced and certified catechist has just stepped up and offered to help me. Let me quote from a well-known author, Simcha Fisher, from an article she wrote for the National Catholic Register about this catechesis: "... this Montessori-based program for children has given the kids something I could never be sure I was conveying: a simple, synthesized, profound involvement with the Gospel and with the liturgical

life of the Church. Catechesis of the Good Shepherd was founded in the 50's by two Italian laywomen, one a scriptural scholar and one an expert in Montessori education. Together they conceived of a simple, attractive method for sharing the richness of the Faith with children, who are uniquely capable of accepting the beauty of God's love. The program is presented in three levels, and includes time in the "Atrium," which is a quiet environment where children learn through tactile play.

Catechesis of the Good shepherd emphasizes quiet contemplation and -- imagine this -- "the enjoyment of God." The children hear Bible stories and watch them acted out with simple materials; they learn songs and prayers, and are encouraged to play quietly with simple and meaningful objects. One mother explained that CGS "cracked the code" of the Mass for her son, as he learned to become alert to the details of the liturgy: the significance of color, the names and purposes of the various vessels and tools on the altar." Rosemary, my catechist friend, will be here this Sunday at 9:45 to speak with interested families in the Parish Hall.

One more thing, I am working with Communion Liberation, the Ecclesial Movement I am involved with, to bring help to some families in Venezuela. If you are interested, please let me know. Have a most Blessed Lent!

March 24, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

I have been down with a horrible cold and I am not sure how long it will last! In the meantime, there is much work to be done! I am asking for your prayers for my health - this assignment has been very hard on my physical health but has also been great for the state of my soul. And so I am limping along, hoping against hope that God give me enough hours in the day and enough days in the month to do everything!

Mr. Bill Keller just passed away this week. He was (actually he is!) a longtime parishioner here and a great supporter of the school! Please pray for the repose of his soul! I am continually surprised at the fact that so many people who have been pillars in the Catholic Church in Oregon have been members of this parish! St. Agatha's Church is truly a monument to Catholicism in this part of the city and the state. I am begging you to help me in our efforts to preserve this great church for future generations to come! The Preservation campaign for this summer is going very slowly and I am feeling a bit discouraged. But as with everything else in life, God's will be done! I must entrust everything into God's hands!

March 31, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

We are approaching the midpoint of Lent. How have we been doing so far? Prayers? Fasting? Almsgiving? Maybe it's time for you and for me to renew our resolve to not allow this Lent come and go in the way all the Lents of our past had come and gone!

May God help us with His graces to be strengthened in our endeavors to follow Him more closely in this period of time in preparation for the great Paschal Feasts of the Easter Seasons! God bless you!

April 7, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

The life of a priest rises and falls on his faith in the Most Eucharist. The one thing he does that is most consequential for him and for his people is to offer Mass for them - daily. The Holy Mass is the most powerful prayers we could offer to God for ourselves and others because the Holy Mass is truly the encounter with the Living God, in which the Bloodless Sacrifice of Calvary is offered to the Father by the Son in the person of the priest in accord with God's providential design. In

this encounter we could ask God for anything! That is why I have included in my intentions at Mass all kinds of individuals and causes. But the encounter with the living God continues outside of Holy Mass itself. Adoration is the extension of the Mass where proper and meaningful encounter with God takes place without all the attendant rituals of the Mass, which can take away the concentration and the attention it deserves.

We have perpetual Adoration in our little chapel here, but true and proper Adoration takes place also before a closed Tabernacle! I encourage you to come to Mass early on Sunday in order to pay a visit to our Blessed Lord in the Tabernacle and spend a few moments with Him in preparation for Mass and to receive Holy Communion in a more disposed spirit. The Tabernacle will be relocated to its rightful place - at the center of the sanctuary behind the altar, the most significant location in the church. With the Tabernacle in the center of the church we can begin to re-establish within ourselves the centrality of Christ and the His Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament. If Jesus Christ is not the center of our lives, nothing matters!

April 14 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

This week, God has shown me His face once again! My dream for St. Agatha's has been realized through His graces and the indispensable and generous work by Sean MacNeela with the support and encouragement of his family. What do I mean by this blessing? I mean the fact that the beautiful marble Tabernacle was transferred without incident to its rightful place at the heart of the church! I could never thank Sean and his family enough for all the laborious and time-consuming planning and actual work that went into this project! In the end, five Irish men, including Tim Eivers who was on hand to assist, were able to make it happen! Such dedication, such generosity, such devotion! From now on, Jesus Christ our Lord TRULY AND REALLY AND SUBSTANTIALLY PRESENT in the MOST BLESSED SACRAMENT in the Tabernacle is at the central place in our church - once again! And my prayers and hope is that He is the center of the life of each one of us at St. Agatha's. From now on, we have a focus when we enter the church even as we go down on one knee in the gesture of adoration before the Tabernacle!

I believe with all my heart that the fact the marble Tabernacle did not fall apart during transit is a sign of divine approval. I don't know any other reason why these Irish men were able to accomplish such an impossible task! May God bless the MacNeela's and Sean's friends who came to lend a hand. May God bless us with an invigorated faith in the REAL PRESENCE OF JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT! May we never forget this is why He came: to remain with us until the end of the world! Amen!

April 21, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

On this Easter Sunday, we rejoice with the whole Church!

And yet our hearts are heavy as we remember what happened at the beginning of Holy Week to the Church in France. The burning of Notre Dame Cathedral is not only a wakeup call to the fact that the Catholic faith has been collapsing for a long time in Europe. The burning of Notre Dame has served also as a reminder to me and others what the greatest blessing and fortune God has bestowed on the Catholic Church: we have Jesus with us! Every Catholic Church, however humble or insignificant, is a most magnificent building in every city and town and village, because every Catholic Church houses the Body and the Blood of Christ, the Body and the Blood of God's Son! Every Catholic Church, however humble or poor, is the place where the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass takes place for the salvation of the world! Every Catholic Church, however humble or ugly even, is space in which God becomes incarnate - again and again!

Our St. Agatha's church is truly blessed to be the building in which God has resided among His people in this part of the city for more than one hundred years! May God bless us with many more years! Happy Easter!

April 28, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

My first Holy Week here was and is amazing! I thank you for making it most wonderful Holy Week for St. Agatha's by your participation, your presence, and your prayers. How many Holy Weeks have come and gone at this beautiful church? And how many of the parishioners have drawn spiritual sustenance from these amazing liturgies? I, for one, am very grateful that everyone pulled together in order to assist in the worship of God as the Church commemorated these salvific mysteries of Christ's life!

Please continue to rejoice in the risen Lord! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

May 5, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

The burning of Notre Dame Cathedral has served as a wakeup call to many people. All of a sudden, the whole world sits up and pays attention to this great monument to France's Catholicism. To most of the experts, the cathedral was everything else. To Catholics, the Cathedral was one of the most magnificent achievements of Christians in the middle ages. For me, I am think along the lines of the Archbishop of Paris: it was built to house "un morceau de pain!" The whole majestic structure was constructed to house the Blessed Sacrament, and to be the place for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Here in the heart of Sellwood, we have a magnificent structure built to house "un morceau de pain!" St. Agatha is not the Cathedral of Paris, in terms of architectural or artistic values, but St. Agatha has great dignity as the House of God and the Gate of Heaven, where the Blessed Sacrament is revered day and night, and where Holy Mass has been celebrated for a century! Here, how many generations of Catholics have come and gone? How many sermons have been preached, baptisms administered, confessions heard, and weddings officiated? How many Catholics were here in the darkest days of the Second World War, the Korean War, the Viet Nam War, the two Gulf Wars, to pray for their loved ones and to receive consolation and hope? St. Agatha Church is our heritage and patrimony, and she is ailing - at least exteriorly! Her stones are crumbling on the north and west sides, and what has been repaired is now threatening to disintegrate if we don't do anything soon.

Since our appeal in January, we have received \$24,500 in pledges and donations. We have a long way to go toward the goal of \$275,000 needed to finish the project. This Sunday I am going to appeal to you once again: please help me in the critical efforts to preserve what has been handed to us from previous generations of faithful Catholics at St. Agatha! I am begging for your support in saving the church building, without which there would be no place for Jesus to stay with us - No Blessed Sacraments, No Mass, No Nothing!

May 12, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

For the month of May, please recite the following prayer every day for your intentions, your sufferings, your sorrows, your concerns, your troubles! May you have the utmost confidence in the Blessed Mother's love and solicitude for you and your loved ones. May you never doubt her most powerful advocacy for you! May you ever rely on her maternal protection for you! May you be comforted by the efficacy of her prayers for you and your families before the throne of God!

Thus, we say together The Memorare: "Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone...who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me."

May 19, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

We are hiring new teachers, and the foremost concern for me as pastor is the Catholic identity of the school: how can we strengthen the Catholic faith of the school with new teachers joining the faculty? That question has prompted me to reflect on the role of family in the handing on of the faith to younger generations. In every family, the parents are the primary educators of their children in the faith. Having your children enrolled in a parochial school does not absolve you as mothers and fathers from teaching your children catechesis and prayers, from modeling a life of faithful discipleship, from living with a view toward heaven in every decision. That is why saying grace before meals, praying together as a family before bed, blessing your children with Holy Water, are some of the important practices that would help form and mold your children into future faithful Christians and disciples and witnesses.

Also, in the church, whenever you pass by the Tabernacle outside of Mass, please make a genuflection on the right knee (if you can do so physically). During Holy Communion, please stop briefly and make an act of reverence by a bow to the chalice of the Precise Blood of Christ on your way back to the your place in the pews (even if you are not receiving from the chalice).

By our gestures of reverence toward Christ our Lord in this way, we help to foster the faith of others and the parish will grow deeper in our affection and our reverence for God!

May 26, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

The month of May is almost over. One more Sunday and the Blessed Mother's statue will go back to its usual place. What we learned from her life? How has the month of May helped us to appreciate more deeply the mystery of God's grace working in our lives? How can we imitate our Mother as we strive to follow her in our Christian discipleship?

I keep going back to the moment when she told the angel her response, a response that would change the world forever, "Let it be done unto me according to Thy Word!" Her obedience is the key to her discipleship. Our obedience to God's will is also key to everything we are and do as Christians. And this obedience to God's will is also the key to our happiness-even in the here and now!

June 2, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

From a homily on the Ascension by Pope Benedict, "It (the Ascension) expresses our belief that in Christ human nature, the humanity in which we all share, has entered into the inner life of God in a new and hitherto unheard of way. It means that man has found an everlasting place in God. Heaven is not a place beyond the stars, but something much greater, something that requires far more audacity to assert: Heaven means that man now has a place in God. The basis for this assertion is the interpenetration of humanity and divinity in the crucified and exalted man Jesus. Christ, the man who is in God and eternally one with God, is at the same time God's abiding openness to all human beings. Thus Jesus himself is what we call "heaven," heaven is not a place but a person, the person of him in whom God and man are forever and inseparably one. And we

go to heaven and enter into heaven to the extent that we go to Jesus Christ and enter into him. In this sense, "ascension into heaven" can be something that takes place in our everyday lives..."

Now, my question is, what are we doing to prepare ourselves for the feast of the Ascension, to live the feast of Ascension, in our day-to-day living? What are we doing to prepare for that place, where Jesus is waiting for us? What are we doing to keep ourselves from being overly attached to this temporary place so as to be eager to go towards the day when we shall follow our Lord's footsteps? May the blessings of the Ascension descend upon all of us here at St. Agatha's!

June 9, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Last week I spoke on the state of the Restoration Project, and I might have appeared a tad bit unenthusiastic about the prospect of completing it. After much prayer and many conversations, I have arrived at a new place: hopeful, serene, and encouraged! And I have found a new attitude towards everything - an attitude and a spirit of gratitude! I am grateful to God for giving me YOU! Yes, you have been most gracious and most generous in your contributions, your giving, and your donations to various causes and projects. Thanks to you we have been able to keep the lights on and the water running! Thanks to you the Archbishop's Appeal this year has surpassed last year's figures. Thanks to you we now have received a total of almost \$32,000 (almost \$6,000 since last Sunday) towards our goal of repairing the exterior of the church!

The bottom line is: I am very grateful to you for everything you have given and everything you have done for the church! Every dollar and every minute you gave to the church represent untold sacrifices and self-denial, so that the parish might have a future! Many of the works you did and much of the financial assistance you rendered remain unknown to me and to others, but God knows your heart and He will make sure they will not be forgotten! THANK YOU for everything! God Bless you!

June 16, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

So far, we have received around \$75,000.00 for our Preservation Funds. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!

This week, the *Catholic Sentinel* published the priest assignments effective July 1, 2019. Please pray for all the priests going to their new places. Which also got me thinking of my appointment to St. Agatha last year. It has been almost a year since I took over from Fr. Nathan. I remember being so anxious, restless, and worried about coming here - I had never had a school before. And here, today, I am still alive, more or less. I am truly and deeply and abjectly grateful to you for all your prayers and support. God has seen to fit to give me extra graces so that I would serve Him by serving you to the best of my ability. I hope I have not made your lives too difficult! I hope you continue to help me in my priestly service here. I am always willing to listen to any concern you may have, now or tomorrow!

God bless you and God bless all of us together!

June 23, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

This week's donations to the Preservation Fund has brought our total to about \$85,000!

I am looking forward to this weekend of Corpus Christi Masses so I could offer you all Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament! What a wonderful thing Holy Mother Church has given us!

I also want to invite you to join me at the Traditional Latin Mass whenever your schedule allows, so you can experience the Mass as your parents and grandparents and countless generations of Catholics had experienced it! If there is enough interest I will be have a class or two on the Latin

Mass so you could feel comfortable! Please don't be hesitant to try something new! You will be struck first by the silence of the Mass and you may discover what a great gift silence is at Mass!

June 30, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Including last weekend's donations, the amount collected so far for the Preservation project is still around \$85,000!

This week's reflection is about the priesthood, now that I have entered my 26th year priestly service. As the years went by, I am more and more cognizant of the fact the priestly existence is an existence "FOR" - an existence for the Other and for the others. The older I am, the more I am awoken to the need to live less for myself, but more for others. Unless my life follows the pattern of obedience Jesus our Lord has traced out for me, then I am not living an authentic priestly existence. Unless my life resemble the Host broken and given away at Holy Mass, I am not serving God the way He wants me to serve as priest. I don't know what the future will bring, I do know one thing: God is my companion through thick and thin. If I trust in Him, I shall not be wanting in anything!

Everything is gift. Everything has been given. Everything belongs to Him.

July 7, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

After this last weekend we have collected around \$91,000 for our project so far. Thank you!

This past week we celebrate our country's Independence Day. For those like me who had fled the modern form of slavery that is communism, we cannot thank America enough for having opened her arms and embraced us, the "huddled masses" from far off shores! Almost 40 years ago, I arrived in this country as a scared and lonely refugee from a war-torn country without a word of English. Now, 40 years later, I have come to love this country as my own. I appreciate so much the freedom we enjoy here, and I pray for those who are not blessed with it. But the more I cherish my new country's freedom and all the benefits it affords us, the more gratitude I feel I owe to Almighty God for everything. And I am painfully aware of how this freedom could be misused and abused for the wrong reasons and for the wrong ends.

May our life be nothing other than a continuing and enduring act of thanksgiving to God for all His gifts and benefits He has bestowed upon us!

July 14, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

I truly appreciate the outpouring of goodwill towards me concerning my 25 years in the priesthood. I have never wanted to make a big deal of my anniversary, because I know it was not my priesthood but that of Jesus Christ our Lord; because I realize I am nothing but a fragile and flawed human being who do not merit anything - much less the most tremendous gift of the priesthood; and because I know that I have not always lived up to God's glory in my priestly life. (By the way, I am using the present tense and the perfect sense because everything is still true today!)

What is monumental for me is the fact that somehow God has seen fit to preserve me in my vocation, regardless how often I have disappointed Him. I am singing a hymn of gratitude each and every day now to God for this awesome kindness towards me. And I am grateful to all of you for having allowed me to serve you as your priest! I am particularly thankful to Karen Blodgett and the Altar Society for arranging everything, which I did not deserve but appreciate deeply! And I thank all those who wished me well and prayed for me on the special occasion! God bless you all for your generosity!

July 21, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

This summer has not been a quiet and restful one as I had hoped. I have to respond to events on the ground with all my energy - physical as well as spiritual. At times, I felt exhausted; but at the same time, I have been discovering a wonderful truth: as long as I have Jesus within sight, I can deal with things more or less adequately. But as soon I let go of Him - by looking away, by turning my gaze to other things, by relying on my own strength and experience instead, I shall begin to sink and to drown. Without Jesus, the center cannot hold. Without Jesus I cannot remain afloat. But with Jesus, I am intact - physically, mentally, and spiritually. Yes, even my physical strength remains strong if I am spiritually grounded in Him - in prayer and through the sacraments. In these dog days of summer, we might feel a sense of spiritual lethargy; but this is precisely why we must hold fast to Him - with prayers, adoration, and even Confession. We might be tempted to take a vacation from God, but we shall find out very quickly that we will be in spiritual quicksand if we break off our praying habit for one reason or another! I, for one, am very grateful that, so far, the center is holding for me!

July 28, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Last week, Catholic news sources reported that the Catholic Church in Germany just lost another 200,000 members in 2018. That means there were 200,000 fewer Catholics who would pay taxes to support the Church; 200,000 thousand fewer Catholics who would continue to participate in the life of the Church and desire the Sacraments of the Church - even Last Rites and Funerals. Meanwhile, in my country Viet Nam, the Catholic Church has experienced explosive growths in recent years. Churches are overflowing with worshipers, seminaries and convents are bursting at the seams. In Germany, some bishops, cardinals and theologians are proposing insane solutions that will worsen the dispute. In Viet Nam, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is being proposed not as one among many ways of living but the way for humanity. Vietnamese Catholics live their faith intensely and fearlessly. The Sacraments, devotions, and charitable works are energizing the Faith in my country. The contrast provides the answers, and the answers are obvious for all to see. St. Agatha has many potentials, we shall grow if we live our faith faithfully. If Jesus is truly first and foremost in our minds and in our hearts, we shall become the best witnesses of the Church in attracting new converts. But if everything is mediocre, Germany's plight shall be right around the corner - or it may be here already.

August 4, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

In these hot summer days, we move more slowly and life seems to stand still at times. Our existence seems to be more unstructured. The one way I know to keep my life anchored and my focus sharp is to stay faithful to my prayer routines. May you do the same and find our Lord accompany you on the way to whatever destinations life may take you this summer!

August 11, 2016 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

The two massacres this past week in Dayton, Ohio and El Paso, Texas have caused so much pain and anguish in the hearts of all of us - once again. Archbishop Chaput of Philadelphia has issued a statement which appeals in a most profound way to me personally, and I want to share parts of it with you (as reported in the Catholic Herald of the UK):

In his August 5 column, Archbishop Chaput said that while he fully supports the use of background checks, "only a fool can believe that 'gun control' will solve the problem of mass

violence.” This is because, “The people *using* the guns in these loathsome incidents are moral agents with twisted hearts. And the twisting is done by the culture of sexual anarchy, personal excess, political hatreds, intellectual dishonesty, and perverted freedoms that we’ve systematically created over the past half-century.”

He was the Archbishop of Denver at the time of the shooting at Columbine High School. During his testimony to the U.S. Senate shortly after the Columbine massacre, Chaput decried “a culture that markets violence in dozens of different ways” that has become “part of our social fabric.” And he lamented even as he asked, “When we build our advertising campaigns on consumer selfishness and greed, and when money becomes the universal measure of value, how can we be surprised when our sense of community erodes?”

In 1999, Archbishop Chaput suggested that America embrace a “relentless commitment to respect the sanctity of each human life, from womb to natural death;” and, prophetically, he stated that the shooting at Columbine High School wouldn’t be the last mass shooting. “In examining how and why our culture markets violence, I ask you not to stop with the symptoms,” he said. “Look deeper.” Chaput repeated this call in his column Monday, saying, “treating the symptoms in a culture of violence doesn’t work. We need to look deeper. Until we’re willing to do that, nothing fundamental will change.” In focusing on the hearts of those who commit mass shootings, twisted by the culture created in the past 50 years, Chaput’s statement was markedly different than others published by Catholic bishops in the wake of the shootings.

August 18, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Until last Sunday, very few of you would have heard of Fr George Kuforiji, the pastor of St. Francis Church in SE Portland. Not any more! He made the front page story in the Sunday Oregonian!

Have you met Father George (as I always address him)? He is a priest and a gentleman! His mild manner and his winning smile would put you at ease immediately! But underneath that graciousness is a personality and an interior that are even more attractive -because he is truly a holy priest and a caring shepherd. Of course, I am only speaking for myself. I am not saying any more than I should say, but I am telling part of the other side of the story. I think before I should judge a priest, I should have met him in person, and I should have attended his Mass, and I should have listened to his homily, and I should have gone to him for confession.

I have met Father many times, and although I have not attended his Mass, I have gone to him for confession - more than once! What has struck me about him is his deep and profound insight the human heart, his compassion for penitents, and his availability. He is truly the shepherd after the heart of the Good Shepherd - kind, compassionate, and solicitous for souls. Father George is an accomplished man, having worked professionally as an engineer. He did not have to become a priest to make a living or to have a new direction in life or to satisfy a personal ambition. He became a priest out of a deep obedience to God as he had discerned a priestly vocation. And as a priest, he cares deeply for souls. He cares deeply that his sheep truly meet Jesus Christ. He cares deeply that they love Him and give him the proper respect and reverence, for he knows man has been made for adoration of God. He cares deeply so that he does smell his sheep!

I have been a priest for many years, and I have meet many priests in my life. Father George's humanity and holiness has won me over – so much so that I would seek him out to help me with my own spiritual life and conversion. Father's priesthood helps me understand what is most essential about this calling: a man for others!

August 25, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

According to Bishop Barron of LA, "By far the fastest-growing "religious" group in the United States is the "none's," that is, those who claim no religious affiliation. In the latest Pew Research Center survey, 25 percent of the country (80 million people) say that they have no formal religion, and the growth of this cohort is nothing short of startling. In 1970, only 3 percent of the country self-identified as "none." In the last ten years, the number has gone from 16 percent to the current 25 percent. When we focus on young people, the picture is even bleaker. Almost 40 percent of those under thirty are "none," and among Catholics in that age group, the number rises to 50 percent. Of all the Catholic children baptized or confirmed these last thirty years, half no longer participate in the life of the Church." (from "First Things")

This is not "new" news for those among us who have been paying attention. What is new is the so-called "The New Evangelization" that aims to arrest this trend that has been proposed in various quarters of the Church. What about us at St. Agatha? What could we do to help win back some of these fallen brethren among our numbers? Let me propose one way that has been shown me by God's grace: Divine Mercy! Yes, let's bring in our hearts all those in our families and among our friends whose shadows have not darkened the door of our church for a long time, and entrust them to Divine Mercy! Let pray for them on Friday after Mass as we recite the Chaplet of Divine Mercy in front of that beautiful image (given to us by Mark and Lucy of Jade restaurant!). I hereby invite you to come and join us every Friday for Mass and for devotion to Divine Mercy as part of our efforts to win back souls for Christ from the clutch of Satan through our appeal to Divine Mercy!

September 1 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

If I am not mistaken, another recent survey by the Pew Research Center has indicated that up to almost 70 percent of Roman Catholics do not believe in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ's Body and Blood in the Blessed Sacrament. Bishop Barron lays the blame for this lamentable situation squarely on poor catechesis. I agree. But there may be some other factors. I am thinking of how different things now receive different level of emphasis in the Liturgy. Thus, during Mass, the altar receives more reverence and honor than even the Tabernacle (they said it's because of the Sacrifice that takes place on it). Now, during Mass, a lector coming up to read the lessons would only make a deep bow at the altar - even if the Tabernacle is situated behind it. And that is just one example. People are told to just bow and forget genuflecting altogether during Mass - except at the beginning and at the end. The end result of the new shift of focus is that people just simply bow at the altar, or at the Tabernacle, or at both. Period. Now, few people would remember or care to genuflect at the Tabernacle. Gradually, we have forsaken the one distinctive gesture of our faith and no longer reverence the Blessed Sacrament with a genuflection of the right knee as we all should. And once people have forgotten how to reverence the Blessed Sacrament in the Tabernacle, other customs are also vanishing - one by one - from the life of a local parish (for example, silence).

I think it's time that all of us work together to restore respect and reverence in church toward the Blessed Sacrament. If we don't have that, we have nothing. The external actions of the body betray what is in the heart. What we do externally with our body affects what we hold interiorly. And vice versa. This whole thing is not about rules and regulations, but it is about how we express our love and affection towards our Good Lord.

September 15, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

After one of last weekend's Masses, a parishioner chided me because I had not thought of praying for the victims of the hurricane in the Bahamas. I was more or less stunned by her reaction. I did

not know how to respond to a correction of such a nature. Ultimately, I knew the parishioner was right: it was a terrible oversight on my part! This unhappy incident was actually propitious, for it provided some great food for thought and reflection. I want to share with you some of those thoughts and ideas.

Now, how would you pray for someone else's intentions? What would you actually do after you have told somebody, "I will pray for you!" For me, this is not an easy matter. I could either say a few Hail Mary's and call it good. But then my conscience would bite me later for being so casual and heartless about people's pain and suffering. Or I could take some time to think about the intentions I am about to pray for. Then I may actually bring those very same intentions to lay at the feet of the Blessed Mother and beg Her to intercede with Her Son for those intentions and for the person needing to be heard. Or I could take the next step which is to make those intentions my Mass intentions! I know if I am not careful, my promise to pray for somebody might just be a kind of reflexive responses similar to those social pleasantries that have no significance!

When I pray, I want to actually think about the circumstances that gave rise to the concerns I must pray for. I want to think about all the pains and all the sorrows those circumstances are causing for someone. I want to imagine the faces of the people who stand in need of God's graces and who are relying on this inadequate priest to intercede for them with Almighty God.

September 22 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

From Luke 14:28-30, "For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.'"

This man is not yours truly, because I have calculated everything carefully with the help of the Finance Council. It's just that we had never collected enough. We did not have the \$275,000 to finish the church as we had hope. All told, we raised just around \$100,000 for the duration of this campaign. The challenge has always been that we have a shrinking donor base, and people seem to have maxed out. So, we decided to go ahead to repair just what was most critical, which was the West Wall of the church, with what we had on hand - the \$100,000 raised from the campaign and our savings. Even with that most modest construction project, our entire Preservation fund is now wiped out with the bills coming due. We could pay the entire invoice in one fell-swoop, but we would not have a dime to our name in the bank!

I am urgently appeal to you to consider donating to the Preservation Fund so that we might be able to build up this account to finish the North Wall next summer. This will also serve as our cushion in case something catastrophic would happen to our church.

I am asking for your help, but I have already forsaken completely any desire to actively try to start another campaign. You are already tired of me, I know. As always, I entrust our life and our future into God's boundless Mercy.

September 29, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

There will be no morning Mass Tuesday through Thursday this week (October 1-3, 2019). We celebrate Mass with the school on Monday, September 30.

Please pray for the priests of the Archdiocese who will be with Archbishop Sample this week in Newport to work on the strategic plan for our Archdiocese.

October 6, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

On this First Sunday of the month of October, I would like to invite you to consider taking up the Rosary and pray this great prayer from our tradition. Many of us cannot finish the day without saying five decades of a particular series of mysteries. I am earnestly asking that each one of you pray at least a decade of the Rosary a day and mediate on the particular mystery of the day. This way, we become familiar with the life of our Lord, and we can reflect on a certain aspect of our Lord's life as it relates to our own life, and we can ask our Lord for strength in order to cope with whatever we are lacking. The Rosary is a powerful prayer that can overcome adversarial forces against our faith. It is a beautiful way to increase our affection for Christ and His Mother. And it is Consoling.

I have a few more ideas I will share with you all at Mass this Sunday.

October 13, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

The idea of the Rosary Pilgrimage is to pray for your families and to strengthen the bond between you and your pastor. There are many of you whose homes I have never visited, although you may live a few blocks from the church. The idea here is that we belong to the same destiny and we belong to each other, and your happiness and your joys are mine and mine are yours. There must be some way for us to identify with each other - in faith and mission. I hope this makes sense. I am the priest and you have been entrusted to me by the Archbishop. I have a duty to know you and your families - I who have been given the charge to be administering to you the mysteries of Salvation. I cannot be adequate to my tasks unless I know the sheep of my spiritual flock. I have to admit I have not been very successful at my efforts in trying to know you - I am terrible at remembering names and faces!

So, if you would like to host the Rosary for a particular month, please contact Karen in the Office (please include a few options for date and time). I will recruit a few folks to go with me to your homes on this spiritual pilgrimage. We will come over and pray the Rosary with you for your intentions, and we could have coffee afterwards (nothing fancy). But we don't even need to do that, if you don't want to! You also get to keep the statue of Our Lady of Fatima in your home until the next gathering.

God bless you!

October 20, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

I am happy to report that our first Rosary pilgrimage was held last week at the Eklund's and it was swell! We had the Rosary in both English and Vietnamese! The next Rosary Pilgrimage will be hosted by the Wade's for the month of November. Ideally I would like to have the Rosary on the First Saturday of the Month. If your family cannot accommodate the pilgrimage on Saturday morning but still desires to have it, perhaps we could think about First Friday evenings.

I want to let you know also that we will have the Auxiliary Bishop of Portland, Bishop Peter Smith, with us for our School Mass on the 12th of December on the great feast of our Lady of Guadalupe! To help our children be familiar with the Mexican culture we have engaged the service of the Portland Mariachi Band, who will be responsible for the music at the Mass and who will also serenade with traditional Mexican songs our Lady of Guadalupe at the end! The Eklund's have donated a magnificent image of Our Lady of Guadalupe for this feast! Our parish is going to shoulder half of the cost of the whole event, which would come to about \$500. Therefore, I want to take this great opportunity to ask you for your patronage of this blessed religious and cultural celebration! I am looking for five sponsors to help with the expenses. If you feel this is something you would like to be a part of, please let me know!

Enough for now! God bless you!

October 27, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

This Saturday, the 26th of October, one of our own will be ordained to the Holy Order of the Diaconate - Greg Pashley!

Greg is an exemplary Catholic. As a husband, a father, a son, a police officer, His life has been a clear demonstration of the concept of living as salt and light in the world. He is greatly concerned with helping his family to live the universal call to holiness even as he himself is striving to live this call. He is also mindful of the need to help his fellow Catholics to achieve the same. Greg has been very helpful to me in so many ways - not least among which is his service at the altar every Saturday evening. He has been a source of encouragement as well.

I am very grateful to the Archbishop Sample for his selection of Greg to the Holy Order of the Diaconate and for Greg's assignment to serve at our parish. From now on, you will see him at Mass assisting as deacon at the altar. Greg will also be preaching at all weekend Masses once a month. I think you will appreciate his spiritual insights and encouragement. As deacon, Greg can also preside at baptisms, marriages (without Mass), graveside services, Vespers, and Holy Communion services. I am very excited of having Greg with us!

I invite you to pray for Greg and his family on this occasion of his ordination and beyond! This whole journey to the diaconate was possible because of his wife's support and accompaniment. Christine Pashley has been a great help and a companion to her husband on the road of discernment and preparation! She is our school's office manager and our school families greatly appreciate her service, her can-do attitude and her winning smile! Greg's two children, Theo and Justine, play a crucial role in helping their father to get to this point. They are great children and model students! Please extend to him your handshake of friendship and wish him well when you see him this weekend!

November 3, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

In these tumultuous and uncertain times, we have an excellent patron and intercessor in St. Joseph. Good old St. Joseph is truly powerful with his foster Son - Our Blessed Lord! So, I would like to share with you my most favorite prayer to St. Joseph and invite you to pray along with me every day for yourselves, your families, our parish, and the Universal Church whose Patron Saint is St. Joseph.

AD TE, BEATE JOSEPH (By Pope Leo XIII)

TO thee, O blessed Joseph, do we come in our tribulation, and having implored the help of thy most holy Spouse, we confidently invoke thy patronage also. Through that charity which bound thee to the immaculate Virgin Mother of God and through the paternal love with which thou embraced the Child Jesus, we humbly beg thee to graciously regard the inheritance which Jesus Christ has purchased by his Blood, and with thy power and strength to aid us in our necessities. O most watchful Guardian of the Holy Family, defend the chosen children of Jesus Christ; O most loving father, ward off from us every contagion of error and corrupting influence; O our most mighty protector, be propitious to us and from heaven assist us in our struggle with the power of darkness; and, as once thou rescued the Child Jesus from deadly peril, so now protect God's Holy Church from the snares of the enemy and from all adversity; shield, too, each one of us by thy constant protection, so that, supported by thy example and thy aid, we may be able to live piously, to die holy, and to obtain eternal happiness in heaven. Amen.

November 10, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Archbishop Sample, Archbishop Emeritus Vlazny and Bishop Smith are going to Baltimore for the Fall Plenary session of the conference of US Bishops. We shall pray for them and for the Church in this country as they take up and discuss weighty matters.

Here at St Agatha we continue to carry on our mission of evangelization. Apart from the school which is the main venue of our evangelizing endeavor, we shall inaugurate the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. It is and it is not a program or an initiative. It is primarily a response from our heart - heart in love with Our Blessed Lord, the only Good Shepherd, and filled with the desire to make Him known to other hearts, especially those of the most innocent and youngest among us. Rosemary Rettig is our Catechist and she is forward to the opening of our Atrium here. Please contact me for more information.

I will have on the Catechesis and on the catechist in my next article.

November 17, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

One of my goals is to invite back to Sunday Mass school families who are Catholic and who no longer attend Mass regularly. Many have activities on Sunday morning and Mass becomes secondary. This past week, Mr. Prevot, who teaches religion at our school, issued a clarion call to his students to make Holy Mass a top priority on Sunday. He said three words directly to them, "Go to Mass!" I hope some of them will consider his challenge with their families.

Three years ago when I was still at my old parish, I had to cancel Mass on this one particular Sunday at my Mission in Vernonia because of the foul weather and the impassable roads. All of a sudden, I had three extra hours on Sunday to be spent leisurely! Like kids on a snow day, I was very happy - at first! Then the joy wore out and I became restless, and even regretful. I began to think of my people in that god-forsaken-land of Vernonia who had been waiting all week for Sunday Mass and how they must now wait another week before they could receive our Lord. At that moment, I realized how the Mass was truly the one thing without which we could not live! I think if we would only realize the simple fact that the Mass is life itself, we would never be willing to miss Sunday Mass for any reason.

For some people, a perfect Sunday morning is having breakfast in bed and reading the NY Times. For Catholics, the Mass defines our Sunday. It does not matter if one is a priest or a lay person, the Mass is where we encounter God and where we receive into ourselves the seed of eternal life. If any of you know somebody who is Catholic but has not been practicing the faith for a while, encourage him or her to just go to Mass - anywhere! Give God an hour on Sunday and you will learn quickly that that one hour is the best investment of your time!

November 24, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

On June 2, 1979, after more than 30 years of communist oppression, St. Pope John Paul II celebrated Mass in Warsaw's Victory Square. During that unbelievable event, the masses chanted, "We want God! We want God!" Ten years later, the Berlin wall came down, and with it the entire Soviet Bloc in Eastern Europe. The unraveling of communism in the West could not have happened, I believe, without divine intervention.

Thirty years on, I continue to marvel at what happened in such a short period of time. Human beings will never stop trying to build utopia in this world, but man-made kingdoms and empires never last. On this last Sunday of Christ the King of the universe, I ask that all of us renew our pledge of loyalty to our King, come what may. May we always look to Christ for guidance and protection on our pilgrim way.

May our hearts and minds yearn for Christ even as we struggle to survive in this world, this vale of tears.

December 1, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Back in 2007, in the middle of the presidential election campaign, I came across a newspaper article about a Navy buddy of Sen. John McCain who was with him at the Hanoi Hilton during the years 1968-1971. He was a fighter pilot who was shot down in North Viet Nam at the same time as John McCain (if memory serves). Like all the prisoners of war at the Hanoi Hilton, he was placed in solitary confinement. At 24 years of age, having never been treated so cruelly, he was going insane. Finding himself unable to endure the solitude, the silence, the isolation, he decided to end it all. He decided to commit suicide by refusing to eat, but just before he began his self-inflicted starvation, he remembered a line from the Baltimore catechism taught him by the nuns many years before: "*God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this life, so as to be happy with Him forever in the next.*" And right there and then he was determined to end his suicidal attempt.

As we begin another liturgical year with the First Sunday of Advent this Sunday, may we remember the reason why God has put us here. May our grasp of the *raison-d'être* of our life helps us continue to shape and influence all decisions we shall make this coming year. May our hearts be filled with gratitude and affection for our God!

December 8, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

Advent means many things, among which is this meaning: to be prepared! And the best way to prepare ourselves to celebrate Christmas and to welcome our Lord into our lives even now is to go to Confession. Yes, I know, it is a hassle to go to a priest for Confession! Even I feel awkward at times in the confessional - not hearing confessions, but to make confession! Yes, I am a penitent who realizes he needs the grace of Confession and who have hesitated more than once to approach this most wonderful Sacrament! Confession is the Sacrament of the dead, for it revives the soul that has lost sanctifying grace through mortal sins. But Confession is also invaluable to those who have been somewhat wounded by venial sins. I dare say that, in some way, Confession is more crucial than Holy Communion.

I beg you to take some time this Advent to prepare your hearts for Confession and to resolve to go to Confession. Father Waddill will be here this Sunday and next Sunday between 9:30 and 11am to hear your confessions. And I will be available in the Confessional before every weekend Mass - not just on Saturday! As for me, I go to confession at least once every two weeks, for I am so much in need of forgiveness for all my failings as priest and as a human being! I know I cannot live without Confession! God bless you!

December 15, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

The celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe was a smashing success by worldly standard! But we are not using worldly standard! Instead, I am boasting the kindness of God for having blessed this celebration with graces upon graces! First, we have generous donors that helped make this event happen - financially. I am deeply grateful to the Meyers, Chuck McDonald, Barbara Griffin and the Knights of Columbus for their generosity and enthusiastic support! I am so grateful that Bishop Peter Smith agreed to be the main celebrant for Holy Mass - the heart of this festive occasion! Bishop Smith also blessed the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe (donated by the Eklund's of Jade Bistro fame) at the same Mass and gave a thoughtful exhortation to the students before the final blessing. I am so happy that Deacon Felix Garcia assisted the good Bishop at the altar

and also gave a fantastic homily on the meaning of the feast! And the Portland Mariachi band was beyond phenomenal! I am so happy that our school children had an exposure to the beautiful Mexican culture in the context of a religious festival deeply revered and cherished by the people of Mexico. The honor guards of the Knights of Columbus also were on hand to add solemnity to the occasion! Tim Eivers was around to make sure everything was ready! And, of course, the students were assisting with sacristan's duties and altar-serving duties!

May the Blessed Mother help us all at St. Agatha's to love her Son even more dearly as we celebrated her Feast Days this week! May our Blessed Mother help us to reflect more deeply on the mystery of Christmas as we approach December 24!

December 22, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

In two days, Christmas will be here. Once again, the Christian people celebrate the most remarkable fact of all: God became a child! In the Christmas mystery, we see the beautiful new thing God has done for mankind - something totally unheard of, something totally unexpected, and something so wonderful beyond anything man could ever have imagined!

God is always doing something new for you and for me. In the traditional Latin Mass, the priest, upon arrival at the altar and standing before the Crucifix and the Tabernacle, begins reciting this line from Psalm 42 (*after the sign of the Cross*) "***I will go in unto the altar of God, the God who gives joy to my youth.***" I have lost track of how many times I repeated this verse at the beginning of Holy Mass over the years. Yet, every time I open my mouth to say it at the foot of the altar, a new surge of new life's energy enters within me! Yes, God is always doing something new in my life, God is always giving joy to my youth, even if I am almost 60 years old! There is an venerable retired priest who is residing at Maryville, Father Vincent Cunniff, I think he must be at least 97 years old. But go see him for yourselves and you shall see how youthful he is! His soul is filled with God, the God who continually renews the joy of his youth!

Isn't God amazing? Ever ancient, ever new! May all of us contemplate the mystery of Christmas, and beg Him, the Divine Infant, to come into our life and renew it with His grace!

December 29, 2019 Bulletin: My Dear Parishioners,

On the cusp of a new year of grace, I would like to propose a year end resolution: to offer thanks and gratitude to the Almighty God for the passing year that is coming to close. The year 2019 is about to end, but some of the issues and problems and headaches that have arisen within it might not leave us. Looking back on 2019, we also recognize, at the same time, the hands of God guiding us through all the events of life - big or small. And everything that has happened whose effects continue to haunt us to this day was and has been and shall continue to be occasion of grace for us, regardless whether it has brought us sorrow or joy. We realize, most of all, the fact that our God has preserved us in the faith, and has given us another opportunity today to be grateful to Him for the gift of eternal life! Why don't we sing a hymn of praise such as "*Holy God we praise Thy name*" on the last day of the year in gratitude to Him for all the blessings we have received? In fact, why don't we begin the New Year with a new resolution to say a prayer of thanksgiving every day when we wake up in the morning? Why don't we begin to form a habit of being ever grateful to God at every conscious moment of our life? St. Therese of Lisieux has said that gratitude brings us the most grace!

God bless you this New Year 2020!