

A Farewell Message from Fr. Hindsley

LEAKS, LOCKS AND LIGHTS

When I became pastor of St. John the Baptist Parish, Msgr, Jack Fitzgerald told me it was all about “Leaks, locks and lights.” Very good advice on his part for those things do take up a pastor’s time and energy. I mentioned this on the first Sunday at St. John’s (July 1, 2006) I left the pulpit for the first time to preach in your midst in the aisle. You may recall in that homily I added a fourth L ---love. Leaks, Locks, Lights and LOVE! I thought there had to be more to it than the 3 Ls. Sometimes I have mentioned to you that every priest really only has 5 homilies that get repeated in different guises over the years. Now, when I think about it I probably only have one homily and it’s about love. This is not a bad choice since it is the major theme of Jesus himself. The carol says, “Love came down at Christmas.” The Love of God took on human flesh and became man to share our own experience from the inside. The motive for Christ’s coming among us was Love: love for His Father and the Father’s will and plan, love for all humans and the desire to save the world; love to be freely given with the hope that it would be freely returned. Yes, love is not a bad theme to preach on at all. It’s everywhere in the Bible: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). And Jesus’ instruction to us: “God is love and whoever abides in love, abides in God and God in him” (1 Jn 4:16).

We have been through a lot over the last fourteen years. Together we endured the desecration of our church and robbery by drugees on March 2, 2013, and had the almost unique experience of rehallowing the church on Sunday, March 3, 2013 by performing the rites and processing around the church with people singing ‘Let God arise. Let His enemies be scattered. Let those who hate Him flee from before His face.’ Many parishioners rose to the occasion and proclaimed: “This will only make us stronger!” Now as I conclude my service to the parish, we have had to endure the Covid 19 crisis and I hope and pray that it will make us stronger too.

The fourteen years we have been together as a parish have been wonderful. You helped me celebrate my 25th anniversary of priestly ordination on May 25, 2009. I have always sought to make the celebration of the Eucharist the center of our lives together and to make the Mass a joyous experience. We have continued all the wonderful things that you had been doing to express your faith in Jesus and His Church. The annual Fair, which we missed this year (what can I do with all those treasures destined for Grandma's Attic?) has been a great event in the social life of the parish. Over the years your dedication to our friends in Honduras and your generosity to Olancho Aid has blossomed. We now have two teams that visit Honduras and many parishioners sponsor young students in Honduras. We have celebrated the sacraments of baptism, first holy communion, confirmation and marriage joyfully. We have presented our beloved dead to God the Most High with dignity and love and hope in the mercy and loving-kindness of our Father in heaven. We have consistently and generously supported the poor and needy through the Catholic Charities Appeal.

During my time as pastor we redecorated the church building to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the building of the first church in 1911. Pam Duquette did great work in helping with this incredible task. I'll always remember the reaction of parishioners who came into church only to discover "their" pew was not there at all. It was out being restored. Priceless. The parish has a fitting and beautiful place for worship and parish activities. One of the jewels in our crown is the Religious Education Program headed by Susan Orzeck for 15 years. I always took great pride in the fact that the entire program including the annual weekend confirmation retreat was run by parishioners who were willing to give themselves to the education of our young people with dedication, enthusiasm and good example. Thank you, Susan, for your dedication, hard work and love for the parish.

Worship at St. John's has been stable and consistent for 34 years and we can thank Scott Simpkin and, until recently, Matt Richard for making that possible. It's glorious to celebrate the Easter Vigil in the dark and hear everyone singing without books. Like all

celebrations of the Mass, our worship participates in the heavenly liturgy and makes it present to us here and now in Westport.

So many people, motivated by their love for Jesus and for the parish, have given themselves to charitable work: the Honduras Mission teams (Claire Sullivan, Todd Baptista), the Parish Fair (Paula Brown and others), various social events and activities, Westport Friends Helping Friends (Ronnie Beaulieu).

We have developed and maintained friendship with the pastors and members of the Westport Point United Methodist Church over 14 years and made our thanksgiving Service with them an example of Ecumenism in action, recognizing the good in other Christians even as we hope and pray for unity.

Over my time as pastor, Paula Brown, has been my constant help and sustainer. She is the “parish secretary”, but she is so much more. She does not have a job; she has a vocation and has great pastoral skills to help all the parishioners as well as the pastor. She is always there and always ready to help us in our plans, our joys and our sorrows. May God reward her.

Now we make a major transition in our parish life and I hope and pray that the two new co-pastors, Fr. Paul Bernier and Fr. Christ Peschel will serve you well and love you as I have done. The last 14 years have been the happiest of my life (so far!) and that is due to YOU, the parishioners of St. John the Baptist Parish. Thank you for your witness to Christ, for your faith and love and for laughing at my joke! May God bless you abundantly. May Jesus draw you ever closer to Him. May the Spirit fill your hearts with peace and love. May Mary, the Mother of God protect you with her maternal care. May St. John the Baptist always point you to the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.