

Spirit of Life

Parish Newsletter — January/February 2011

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A Letter From Our Pastor

Sharing Love in Different Ways

Dear Parishioners,

What's the most widely observed saint's day in February? The one that's kept even by those who aren't practicing Catholics? Undoubtedly it would be St. Valentine's day, Feb. 14.

The irony is that his feast isn't even on the General Roman Calendar of feasts to be observed throughout the world. That doesn't mean that he's not recognized as a real, historical person, and a genuine saint, but only that his influence throughout the Church has not been as significant as some others'.

So who was St. Valentine? Actually, there are several St. Valentines, as the name was not a rare one in the ancient Roman Empire, but the saint we celebrate was a priest of Rome martyred in the late third century. But that doesn't explain how his feast came to be celebrated as the day one sends letters, cards, and presents as expressions of romantic love.

The truth is that the custom of sending tokens of love comes not from any direct connection with St. Valentine, but from the ancient belief that birds begin to pair off on Feb. 14. And if courtship in the natural world occurred then, it must be appropriate for humans, as well. The association between St. Valentine and love notes is a later development.

Nevertheless, it's not wrong to connect the two. Love has many aspects, and our conception of it is richer if we keep more than one of them in mind. Martyrdom is the result of loving God more than our earthly life. St. Valentine was a martyr because of his



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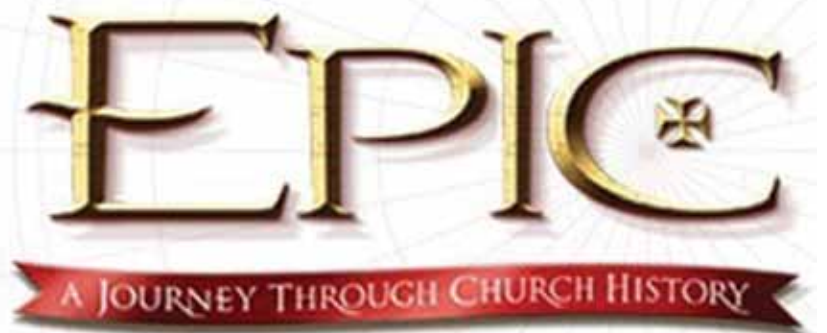
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Once Upon a Time... *Epic Teaches the Exciting Story of Church History*

"It is to help people whose first interest wouldn't be a history book to engage in the study of history. The story that this history tells us is exciting. Epic is for anyone who wants to know more fully what being Catholic is about."

-Fr. Chad



Thousands of years ago, a story began. Over time, this story has had many twists and turns. It is filled with intrigue, betrayal, rebellion, devotion, adventure, and love. This story is yours and it is mine. It is the rich history of the Catholic Church, and you can learn more about it right here at Spirit of Life.

Starting in January, *Epic: A Journey Through Church History* will be offered every Thursday beginning at 6:30 p.m. for 20 weeks. *Epic* utilizes the same structure as the popular *Great Adventure Bible Study*. It combines videos, workbooks, and discussions to appeal to various age groups (teens and older) and learning styles. The evenings will be led by Fr. Chad, who will be assisted by Trish Rennich. Both are very excited about this amazing program.

"People can't understand their Faith unless they know where we've come from," Fr. Chad says. "The same goes for our family, their journey, and where our ancestors came from and how they carved their lives. You understand who you are by knowing where you come from. We, as Catholics, are a family that encompasses time and space."

Trish, a stay-at-home mom of two and previous participant in multiple *Great Adventure* studies, will be assisting Fr. Chad.

"I have an interest in Church history because it is important to know where we've come from," Trish says. "In school, we learn history according to wars. I've never before

learned history through God's perspective. It's a great way to look at it."

"You study Church history, and you learn about what we've endured, where we've come from, and what makes us Catholic," Fr. Chad says. "This study includes the controversial issues, such as the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition. It allows people to see those things in the context of the time when they happened and help them to understand why good, faith-filled people would make those decisions. God-willing, future generations will study our present and say, 'What were they thinking? How could abortion be legal in a civilized society?'"

Fr. Chad points out that one of the great things about *Epic* is its accessibility and presentation of the subject matter.

"The program is accessible, and it's designed not to be intimidating," he says. "It is to help people whose first interest wouldn't be a history book to engage in the study of history. The story that this history tells us is exciting. *Epic* is for anyone who wants to know more fully what being Catholic is about."

"I am so blessed that I can find grace and closeness to God through these studies," Trish says. "When you seek God out, He gives you graces and blessings."

To register or for more information about *Epic*, please contact the parish office at 701-663-1660.

Lord, Teach Me to Pray

Nearly 500 years ago, St. Ignatius of Loyola wrote *The Spiritual Exercises*, a series of prayers and contemplative practices written to help deepen the spiritual lives of its readers.

In September, Spirit of Life began a women's prayer group called Lord Teach Me to Pray (LTMTTP) that uses St. Ignatius' work as a guide. LTMTTP is a growing prayer series that happened to begin on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001 in Louisiana. It was developed to meet the desire of women for ongoing spiritual growth and development of deeper prayer lives.

Last fall, a group of 29 participants representing Bismarck and Mandan parishes participated in our parish's first LTMTTP session. This first of three phases of LTMTTP lasted 12 weeks and focused on developing good religious habits based on the spiritual teachings handed down to us and the Christian virtues.

Each meeting in Phase I featured an opening prayer, followed by personal faith sharing and presentations on Ignatian prayer and a particular Christian virtue. Scripture passages were given for daily use to encourage the women to participate in 15 minutes of personal prayer each day to build a sense of each virtue. The Scripture passages and reflections also emphasized to participants the importance of living an authentically Catholic life in the social situations they encounter daily.

"We want to be a praying community that seeks God first," says Marlane Peterson, who has helped launch and facilitate LTMTTP at Spirit of Life.

Marlane chose to pursue LTMTTP because she saw a need for this type of group in our parish community.

"I've been involved with prayer groups for women for many years," she says. "I've always felt that people want to pray, but they don't always necessarily know how. Ignatius saw the need and taught people how to pray."

Marlane emphasizes that prayer should be a high priority for those who wish to achieve personal spiritual growth.

"People may know the *Catechism*, but do they know how to pray?" she asks. "I'm really passionate about teaching people how to pray in order to deepen their relationship with Jesus, and transform their lives and the lives of their families."

For several Spirit of Life parishioners, Phase I of LTMTTP did prove to be a transformative experience.

"The LTMTTP series has been awesome for me," says one participant. "I learned to pray in a way I did not know how to before. I also feel called to pray through the day."

"I truly did not know how clearly God could speak to me, and what an amazing experience that is," says another participant. "I also can accept and know that there are times He does not speak to us, and it is not because of something I did or did not do."

Because of its popularity, our parish will begin another session of Phase I of LTMTTP on Jan. 25, and continue every Tuesday from 7-9 p.m. at the church. Parishioners may repeat Phase I if desired, and we will also begin the 30-week long Phase II in September of 2011.

For anybody interested in helping as a facilitator, there will be a discernment retreat led by the LTMTTP founder and spiritual advisor held at our parish on Jan. 21 and 22. This retreat will be open to both men and women, and Spirit of Life hopes to begin a men's LTMTTP group in the near future. Please contact the parish office at 701-663-1660 for more information.



New Stained Glass Windows Com



Our church sanctuary has had two beautiful additions in the past few weeks. The first pair of stained glass windows, of a planned four, depict images of St. Mary and St. Joseph. The remaining two windows will include interpretations of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha and St. Ignatius of Antioch.

The St. Joseph window is a gift from the St. Joseph Parish in Mandan, as a way of saying “thank you” for using Spirit of Life’s facilities during St. Joseph’s four months of renovations. St. Joseph used our parish facilities mostly for funerals and daily Mass.

Fr. Patrick Schumacher, St. Joseph pastor, wanted to express the gratitude of the parish, and after discussing several ideas with Fr. Chad, they decided to commission the stained glass window. Fr. Chad says that the onus behind the project was not only to beautify the church, but also to permanently add to its structure, creating something that couldn’t be moved. He sees the window as a way to commemorate the cooperation between the two parishes, and as a symbolic reminder of their connectedness.

Fr. Chad contacted Nick Markell, an iconographer and stained glass artist from St. Paul, Minn. After travelling to Mandan to get a feel for the church’s worship space and liturgical celebrations, Nick drew up a sketch and the plans went forward.

The process used to create the stained glass windows hasn’t changed much over time, Nick says. He uses power hand tools and an electric kiln to fire the glass, but it’s the same basic process that has been



memorate the Lives of the Saints

used for centuries. According to Nick, the style of the windows is traditional, while the colors are more contemporary. He says it creates “a bridge from the past to the future.”

Each two-panel window is approximately 108 by 37 inches. The size helps to create the feeling that the saints are larger than life.

“I love the idea of these giant figures,” Fr. Chad says. “Giants of the Faith...looking over us and praying for us.”

The position of the windows was intentional, as well, which Nick says, “reminds us they are with us in worship spiritually.”

This echoes what St. Paul writes in Heb 12:1 about being “surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.” The saints surround us, intercede for us, and worship with us, in addition to providing examples of living out the Faith.

“The windows are meant to be an expression of hospitality and welcome, even when the church is empty,” Fr. Chad says. “They’re an opportunity to enter meditative prayer, and to contemplate the lives of the individual saints.”

Art as a teaching device for theological truths is a tradition dating back to the earliest times of the Church.

“We live in communion with the saints all the time,” Fr. Chad says.

Once completed and installed, these stained glass windows will be a wonderful reminder of this.





The Precepts

You shall attend Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor.

You undoubtedly know about the Ten Commandments. You probably can name some of them, even if you can't come up with the entire list. They were given by God to Moses and have been passed on from Judaism to Christianity.

But did you know that the Church has additional fundamental requirements that all Catholics are expected to follow? They're called the "Precepts of the Church," and earlier generations heard more about them. But they are still in force today, and you can find them in paragraphs 2041-2043 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Some people may question whether the Church really has the authority to legislate binding requirements for her members. The answer is "yes," because that authority was given by Jesus to St. Peter and the other Apostles. "Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," Christ declared (Mt 18:18; see also Mt 16:19). That authority was passed down by the Apostles to their successors, the bishops, who govern the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The *Catechism* (2041) points out that the precepts "are set in the context of a moral life bound to and nourished by liturgical life," because the experience of the Church confirms the historic teaching that it is almost impossible to maintain a Christian life apart from worship with other Christians. It also points out that the precepts state "the very necessary minimum in the spirit of prayer and moral effort." They have as their goal the purpose of the whole Christian life, "the growth in love of God and neighbor."

It is the obligation of all Catholics to worship at Mass every Sunday. In addition, we are obliged to worship at Mass on the Holy Days of Obligation.

of the Church *First Precept*

This introduction brings us to the first precept, “You shall attend Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor.” It is the obligation of all Catholics to worship at Mass every Sunday. In addition, we are obliged to worship at Mass on the Holy Days of Obligation. That should not be a heavy burden! In most of the United States, there are only five of them, due to the bishops’ decisions to transfer their observance to Sundays or to abolish their obligatory character. And of these five, three aren’t obligatory when they fall on Monday or Saturday. (Most of the world observes 10 holy days of obligation besides Sundays.)

Why does the Church consider it so vitally important to attend Mass every Sunday? Christianity observes the pattern of weekly worship which comes from our Jewish heritage. But the Church in New Testament times transferred Christian worship from the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, to Sunday, the first day, because Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday (Mt 28:1). (Reference Acts 20:7, 1 Cor 16:2, Rev 1:10 to see the importance of Sunday to the New Testament Church).

And why the Mass rather than some other form of worship? The Mass or Eucharist (“thanksgiving”) is, according to Vatican II, “the source and summit of the Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium*, 11). The very variety of names which are used for that service indicate the importance it holds for the Church: Holy Sacrifice, Divine Liturgy, Sacred Mysteries, Holy Communion, and many others. At Mass, we participate in the presentation to the Father of Jesus’ perfect sacrifice offered once on the Cross. We can experience a foretaste of the worship in heaven, and we can be nourished spiritually as we feed on the Body and Blood of the Lord Himself.

Of course, there are the occasional times when there are legitimate reasons to miss Mass – if we are sick or caring for someone too sick to be left alone, or if our work schedule prevents our attendance at any Mass that day, or if we’re in some remote village where a priest can come to celebrate Mass only once a month or so. But all too often, Catholics succumb to the temptation to expand an inconvenience to an insurmountable barrier. Those who tell the priest, “My body was out on the golf course, but I was with you in spirit at Mass,” should receive the reply, “Next Sunday bring your body to Mass and go play golf in spirit.”

The second part of the precept, to rest from servile labor on Sundays and holy days, is probably not a big problem for many people. Its point is that the Church recognizes our need for refreshment for our bodies as well as for our souls. With the increased opportunities for worship at Mass with Vigil Masses on Saturday and Sunday evenings, few people are at work during every service. If working through all available Masses is a schedule you’ve set for yourself, perhaps you should review your priorities. If you’re an employer or manager who sets schedules for employees, do you allow them an opportunity to meet their obligation to worship?

This first precept, then, concerns our attendance at Mass, the highest form of Christian worship. And worship is an obligation, yes, but also a privilege. We should view it as an opportunity to fulfill our highest calling as humans. The goal of Christians is to be with God in heaven. Worship at Mass is the closest we get while still here on Earth.





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Sharing Love in Different Ways *continued from front cover*

love – his love for Jesus Christ and His Church. If he had not loved God so much, he could have repudiated his Lord and saved his life. We in turn express our love by sending cards and gifts on St. Valentine's day.

But isn't that what stewardship as a way of life is, a little martyrdom? Not to push the image too far, but when we are faithful stewards, we give up a little portion of our lives out of our own love for Christ. Most Christians will not be called on to be martyrs, in the sense of forfeiting our physical lives for God. But we are called to give up some of our comforts, indulgences, and riches because of our love for Him.

So then, as you prepare to celebrate and share your love with your Valentine this month, remember St. Valentine and his love for Christ. As well, keep in mind that God loves us, and return that love with your own toward Him. Loving God will be reflected in how you prioritize your use of the time, talent, and treasure God has entrusted to you. As St. John wrote (1 Jn 4:9), "We love because he first loved us."

Happy St. Valentine's Day!

In Christ,

Fr. Chad Gion

Pastor