

## **FAITH IN OUR FUTURE HOMILY #1**

Delivered by Fr. Robert Lotz 3-22-09

We hear in our Gospel today that God so loved that world that Jesus was sent to bring eternal Life to all who would accept it, to all who would come to believe in him through the power of his resurrection.

We also hear that it's a struggle for creatures to accept this gift, because the challenges of walking between darkness and light often get in the way of our response to God's love. The challenge is living in the Light of Christ while being open to sharing the light with those who struggle to believe.

We are reminded that faith is a gift, a freely given gift that we have not necessarily asked for but have received. That, quite frankly, means that those of us who have received the gift have a responsibility to share it with others so they, too, might come to accept the gift of eternal life.

How God moves in the lives of those who do not believe in the Light of Jesus Christ remains a mystery, but it is clear that you and I have a job to do to share the Life we have been given so others might live.

Our First Reading proclaimed that "Early and often the God of our forebears sent messengers to the faithful and unfaithful alike, having compassion on those who would listen." Those who resisted were allowed to walk away, but for those who would listen, new life was possible even in the midst of struggle. God continues to send messengers and messages to people until this very day, and that's what I want to speak to you about this weekend.

My homily is more formal than usual, because I want to make sure everyone hears the same message this weekend and that I don't leave anything out at one Mass or another.

At the risk of missing some families who have left for a well-deserved vacation during Spring Break or some of those people who winter in warmer climates and don't believe Spring has returned to Wisconsin yet, it's time to begin giving you an overview of a project the Archdiocese has asked local parishes to promote and actively sponsor.

I want to share the same information with you, whether you belong to Blessed Trinity or to Saint John Evangelist, because these efforts will be going on at the same time in each parish. Also, because many people from one parish now attend Mass at the other's church because of a preference of time, it's necessary to make sure everyone hears what will happen at their own parish, and it doesn't hurt to know what's going on at the other.

Bear with me, please, as I speak to you about these stewardship plans and the financial matters that are part of them. I start by honestly saying that this is the least favorite part of my role as pastor: I do not enjoy speaking about financial needs or budgetary concerns, especially after hearing the Gospel we did last week. But we live in the real world, and the church is here to provide for physical and practical needs as well as spiritual ones.

Our parishes are in what is called "Wave Three" of an archdiocesan initiative to support Catholic Education and Lifelong Faith Formation. The campaign is called Faith in our Future, and every parish is asked to raise funds for the religious education needs of their local parish and for the archdiocese. 60% of the funds raised will return to the local parish, 40% will be given to the archdiocese. You will learn much more about the specifics of the campaign in the weeks to come, but today I want to state some preliminary facts. I ask that you pay close attention now so you can help give clear information to those parishioners who aren't with us this weekend.

First, I would like to introduce the many people from both parishes who have agreed to be part of Faith in our Future and whose efforts will make it successful. There are about 80 volunteers between the two parishes who have already agreed to lead various committees and subcommittees to assure active support in this initiative. You will learn more about their names and the specific roles they will play through special communications you will receive starting this week. At this time, though, I would ask any of the leaders present here at Mass today to

stand and be acknowledged for your generous willingness to help the parishes and the archdiocese in this important endeavor.

### WILL YOU PLEASE STAND?

These are the people who will make this campaign successful, and I want to thank them publicly at the start of this process for agreeing to serve the parishes in this way. Now to some specifics:

At the start it is important for me to say what this campaign will NOT involve:

it does not affect the annual budgetary contributions you parishioners currently donate for the regular upkeep and programs of the parishes. We continue to need your regular support of the parish to make ends meet. Particularly at Blessed Trinity, this means searching your hearts deeply and helping us balance our upcoming budget for 2009-2010. Last year parishioners at Blessed Trinity pledged \$ 493,000 dollars; this year's pledges are only at \$ 463, 358, down \$ 30,000 from last year. Certainly our current economic situation makes this all the more difficult, but I must ask you to consider giving more. I also ask those families with young children FROM BOTH PARISHES to seriously consider enrolling your children in Saint Mary's School this coming year. It is a high-quality, faith-based educational environment with proven positive results for the education and faith life of our communities' young people.

At Saint John Evangelist, this campaign has nothing to do with the work of the Expansion Committee over the last several years. The work of that committee has started up again and we fully intend to start work on the expansion before this calendar year ends. That will include the construction of an elevator and making Saint John Evangelist fully accessible for all parishioners, as well as expanding the capacity of the church. We already have funds available for the expansion project and the Faith in our Future Campaign will address other needs Saint John Evangelist parish has.

Faith in our Future also is a program independent from the annual Catholic Stewardship Appeal, and we are asked to continue our contributions to support the on-going general work of the archdiocese.

I have spoken long enough. Further details will be given to you over the next weeks and months, including the specific projects we want to start, the amounts each parish will be asked to raise, and the process we'll use to accomplish our hopes.

I want to be honest and tell you I was very skeptical of this campaign at first. This doesn't seem to be a good time to be starting this, given all the things each parish is already involved in. But I have honestly become convinced of its value for us as members of two wonderful Catholic Christian communities.

What is most important is not how much money we will be able to raise. What really matters is how each one of us, you and me and everyone else here today (and those who will return to us soon) renews ourselves through a process that invites us to have Faith in our Future and assure the positive development of a local church that welcomes all people, shares the faith with its younger members and lives the Gospel in the world.

That will take renewed efforts to welcome others, provide enriching programs of faith-development for all of us, and serve the needs of the poor and needy among us. That's what living the Scriptures means, that's what Faith in our Future is all about and that is the journey I invite every one of us to begin today.

If you have questions before the printed materials come your way, please contact me or the Campaign Chairpeople of either parish.

At Blessed Trinity, the Chairpeople are Carol and Russ Schuler and Carol and Gene Specht.

At Saint John Evangelist the Chairpeople are Karen and Jack Egan and Lorrie and Mel Free.

Thanks for all you do to help our parishes live in the Light, not in darkness.  
Please continue our journey of faith.