

**“...you shall warn them for me.”** (*Ezekiel 33:7*)

September 21, 2011

Dear Parishioners:

I am sending this letter to all, since it is extremely difficult to know exactly who should especially be the focus of this message. Each person or family needs to decide for themselves. If it doesn't seem to apply to you directly, at least you will know my concerns for others and you can join me in my regular prayer for them.

In the readings for the 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the year, in the book of the prophet Ezekiel, God told the prophet, “I have appointed you watchman for the people. When you hear me say anything, **you shall warn them for me.**” The prophet was also told that he would be held accountable if he failed to warn them. That same Sunday the Gospel spoke about fraternal correction, out of concern for one another. Following these scriptures, as pastor, I have a responsibility to point out to the Parish a serious matter.

The concerns are actually several, but have at their core the evident fact that **many people are taking the practice of their Faith much too lightly.** Sunday Mass attendance is no longer seen as an important obligation. The call to discipleship is being ignored. God's will is, for many, just another option among the many that clamor for a family's attention. **There is an increasing secularism throughout our society, and Catholics are not immune.**

I suspect that many American Catholics approach the practice of their Faith with something of the same sense of entitlement that too often pervades their approach to their country: “I am *entitled* to Freedom; I have rights.” But the continuing cost of keeping those freedoms, those rights—that is, their *personal commitment* to keeping our country strong—is not something they often consider. As a nation, we will not remain strong if our citizenry does not exercise good citizenship and pass those values on to our children.

In the same way, the Church cannot remain strong if Catholics are not committed to living out their faith and passing that on to their children and grandchildren. “Living it out” has practical implications, including praying at home, praying in community (Sunday Mass), and helping with the mission of the whole Church.

**Among all these, Eucharist is key.** It has been said, and quite rightly, that without Eucharist, there would be no Church. But many Catholics no longer faithfully participate in Eucharist. As people set aside weekly participation in Mass and Communion in favor of other priorities and pressures, the inevitable happens: their identity as Catholics fades; their commitment to Christ diminishes; and their judgments about moral issues—as well as decisions about how they spend their money and their leisure time—become increasingly secularized.

**There are reasons why weekly attendance at Mass is a serious *obligation.*** (YES, the obligation to attend Mass is still very much part of Church LAW.) It is not unreasonable to say that the children in a family that only occasionally participates in Mass will foster children who hardly go at all, if ever, and that *their* children likely will not even be baptized. We will follow the pattern that is already evident in Europe, where most churches are empty, the former Christians are becoming increasingly secular and agnostic, and other, non-Christian religions are beginning to dominate the society.

People of this Parish need to make a decision, and act on it. Either Christ and the Christian Community are important, or they're not. Excuses have to be put aside, because we all can find them. Past hurts, disagreements, misunderstandings, cynicism, demands of the world, struggles within the family, multiple priorities and pressures...so many things can effectively push Christ and his Church into a category of low priority. (If you truly have issues that you seem unable to set aside, give me a call and I'll counsel with you. I want to help.)

*A Pastoral Letter to St. William Parish*

**“...you shall warn them for me.”** (*Ezekiel 33:7*)

**The intention of this letter** is to especially invite a response from any parishioner who does not regularly attend Mass, or is not adequately training their child in the Faith, or does not take the concerns of the Parish as their own. Please take this letter in the spirit in which it is meant. From the Gospel of a few Sundays ago: “If he listens to you, you have won your brother back.” (*Mt. 18:15*)

Regardless of how people will respond, I am required to speak out. I know the response will vary. Some will read this letter, but the message will be carried off by skepticism or cynicism (“I wonder what he’s REALLY after?”), or past hurts may poison the message. Pressures of our busy lives, worldly attractions, or other concerns will choke off the message. Others will respond at first, even eagerly, but when living out the Faith becomes difficult, they will falter. **These responses are exactly what Jesus had in mind when he told the parable of the sower and the seeds.** (*See the quotation, at the bottom of this page.*) Please be good soil! Take the message to heart, that you may have an abundant life, and life eternal.

**How NOT to respond:**

The Gospels in the next few Sundays give examples, in parable, of how some people choose to respond poorly to God’s invitation. In one Gospel, lacking all gratitude for what God has given, and not liking the message, the people decide to kill the messenger. (*Mt. 21:33-43*) (Please don’t do this!) In the following Sunday’s Gospel, other people find excuses to ignore the message. Some of the excuses sound pretty good, but they’re still excuses—and these people find the banquet shut to them. (*Mt. 22:1-14*)

**How to respond positively:**

- Even if you have not always been faithful in the past—like the son who refused, for a time, to do his father’s work—decide to do God’s will now. (*From this weekend’s gospel. Mt. 21:28-32*)
- Start by deciding not to put off a decision! Then, act on the decision. (Delaying the return to regular Sunday Mass is not simply a delay; it is, in itself, a decision, and not a good one.)
- Take a small step. If your family and religious priorities have been out of order, it’s unlikely that you can change everything overnight. It begins with small steps, consistently taken. For example, decide about Mass for THIS Sunday. After that, make plans for the following Sunday. Decide to link Mass with another enjoyable event, such as a special breakfast or lunch, or some other family event. Another important small step is to establish a regular time for prayer at home. Parents with children at home, pray with your children, every day, without fail.
- Take ownership of your membership. There is a temptation to decide that issues or concerns facing our Parish are “someone else’s issue, someone else’s problem.” Instead, get involved. Serve. Give support. Take responsibility for the success of the Parish.
- Attend to the formal Faith education of children. If not homeschooling, get them in our afterschool religious education classes or enroll them in our school. Make sure other activities such as sports, music, dance, or other enrichments are exactly that: enrichments, which do not interfere with the higher priority of teaching them the ways of the Lord. And always, always, bring them to Mass.

In Jesus,



Rev. Michael G. Savickas, Pastor

“Mark well, then the parable of the sower. The seed along the path is the one who hears the message about God’s reign without understanding it. The evil one approaches him to steal away what was sown in his mind. The seed that fell on patches of rock is the one who hears the message and at first receives it with joy. But he has no roots, so he lasts only for a time. When some setback or persecution involving the message occurs, he soon falters. What was sown among briars is the man who hears the message, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of money choke it off. Such a one produces no yield. But what was sown on good soil is the one who hears the message and takes it in. He it is who bears a yield of hundred- or sixty- or thirtyfold.” (*Mt. 13:18-23*)