

## **An Invitation to Participation**

As a member of the Parish Council I feel a strong duty to be sure that all narratives surrounding life at St. Pets are being heard and properly attended to.

The narrative I want to talk with you today about is entitled an Invitation to Participation.

I want to start out my comments, however, with a declarative statement:

God doesn't require us to be perfect to get to heaven! The lives of the Apostles – the men hand-picked by Jesus – clearly demonstrate this.

God only requires that we consciously strive towards that goal in every way we can. For this He bestowed on all of us a "Moral Compass" or conscience which, with the help of His Grace, guides us in our daily efforts to point us in the right direction during our journey in life.

Our human dilemma is to discern if, in our choices, we are really responding to a Magnetic North or to the True North. Shakespeare said it best; "The choices we make dictate the lives we lead; to thine own self be true." The events we experience in our lives continually challenge us in our ability to properly read our personal compass.

How we apply our personal compass in our choices is what might be called "our usual way of thinking". Jesus, however, constantly reminds us through His Parables and the many other New Testament narratives preserved for us to be ever vigilant and always prepared to move beyond our "usual way of thinking" if we are to remain humble and good stewards of our compass.

Our "usual way of thinking" does affect everyone around us, particularly those closest to us whether we recognize it or not. If we do not learn how to recognize when we need to move beyond our "usual way of thinking" we will never learn how to read our compass well.

For me personally, I know how the subtle and not so subtle events of my life have moved me inexorably beyond my "usual way of thinking" as I finally recognized their significance. Everyone here as well has unique stories to tell about how their lives were subtly and not so subtly changed from personal events experienced. Our "usual way of thinking" is steadily redefined over time as we participate in life.

Now, since everyone's life forms differently, it should be no surprise that how we choose to participate in life is what uniquely defines us as an individual. We must participate. It is inescapable. It is not an option. And like it or not, it is in how we participate, though, that we are measured by God, by others and more importantly by ourselves.

At St. Pets, we as Catholics are presented with many specific opportunities to participate in a spiritual life as a community.

- ) Sunday/Daily Mass and Sacraments
- ) Volunteerism
- ) Prayer/Bible Study Groups
- ) Various Parish Ministries and Campus Needs
- ) Catholic Education
- ) & Direct Financial Giving – Offertory – to name a few.

Participation in as many of these opportunities as possible is part of our commitment as responsible members of the Parish community.

We use our compass to make choices about which of these opportunities we will participate in based on our skills, needs and desires. Each of them have something important and different to offer. Each offer a way to teach us how to move beyond our “usual way of thinking”.

Participation in Sunday Mass and Offertory obligations are the two most connected opportunities I know of as it relates to participation in the Parish. St. Pets exists because there was a community that needed a place to gather and participate in Mass, the Sacraments and a spiritual life. At the same time, it was only made possible by the same community’s necessary and active financial participation to support it. They are inextricably connected. They are the basic foundations for fostering a healthy spiritual life as Catholics.

However, as we see the compass heading for participation in Sunday Mass waver from True North for many Catholics, financial participation now rests on fewer and fewer people. Because of this, it is very hard to come up with the right words to ask people to participate more financially for the multitude of Parish needs. But ask I must. We as a Parish are struggling financially, and I can’t remain silent. The operational needs of the Parish do not go away if we choose not to participate in its financial well-being.

How we choose to participate financially is innately personal on so many levels. I know this well as I know you do too. For those of you who regularly participate in and to the Parish, our gratitude is immeasurable. I am standing here in front of you to invite everyone to move beyond their “usual way of thinking” and to participate as much as possible, and in every way possible, as it relates to the needs of the Parish, financial and otherwise. When a Parish need is communicated, look closely at your compass and see where it points. How can I participate. And remember, you don’t have to be perfect!

Tim Barder: November 2017