

Welcome! A letter from our Pastor

Dear friends in Christ,

I'm willing to bet you'll recognize the first line from the first reading on this 18th Sunday of Ordinary Time: "*Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth, vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!*" It's one of the verses of Sacred Scripture that has made it into the popular lexicon and it's not uncommon to hear it used in everyday conversation. My mother, like most Catholic mothers, I suppose, was famous for saying this to us children whenever we got a little too full of ourselves.

While we most often use the word vanity to mean excessive pride in oneself, it actually comes from the Hebrew word "*hebel*," which means vapor or puff of wind, signifying something fleeting or insubstantial. The writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes, from which today's passage is taken, was aiming to show that despite one's wisdom or knowledge, the only certainty was death and thus one should make the best of the present day. Granted, that's not the most optimistic view of life, but the author, who is writing in the name of King Solomon (though he wasn't really Solomon), is working to help others see that this world is transitory and we would be best advised not to get too caught up in ourselves but rather keep our hearts fixed on the Lord. It was an odd way to convey his message, but you have to admit he came up with a memorable phrase nonetheless.

Hearing this famous passage is an opportunity for us to reflect on the fleeting nature of our life. What are we obsessed with? Is it all about me, and my wants and desires? Or can I work to cultivate a more worldly view, one that keeps the Lord in proper relationship with my heart? To live with true happiness, we should strive to look to that which endures and not that which is gone with a "puff of wind."

I met earlier this week with the Buildings and Grounds Committee, and if there is one thing I've noticed in my first month at SVdP it is that there is, to put it mildly, a high demand for available meeting space on our campus. Given our proximity to the Texas Medical Center, I might even go so far as to diagnose it as an acute issue. And that's just been my experience during July. With the school year soon beginning, I know that demand for space for our various ministry groups, organizations, and committees is only going to grow as room requests pick back up after the summer break.

To look on the bright side, this is a good problem, as it shows that the parish is alive with many people wanting to be part of such groups that wish to meet, but it is a problem nonetheless. We want to be able to accommodate as many of those requests for space as possible, but the reality is that we can't fill all those requests on a regular basis. We're working on solutions, but it's going to take cooperation, patience, and some "give and take" from everyone. It's like a game of Tetris, where we are trying to fit a lot of different moving parts of various sizes into a finite number of spaces.

In looking at a spreadsheet of all the groups and organizations, it seems that we have roughly 100 different ministries or apostolates at SVdP. In my experience, that's not uncommon in a parish of our size and each has its own needs and wants. Some meet only occasionally with a handful of people, while others meet weekly with upwards of 50-75 people or more. Clearly the only space for a group of that size is the Family Center and its two sets of ancillary rooms on either side. You can do the math – it doesn't take long for those spaces to fill up.

And that's just our present reality. It is my sincere hope that through evangelization and Christian witness, coupled with a renewed sense of Stewardship to live our Catholic faith as missionary disciples, we will grow involvement in the life of the parish. I'd love to see all 100 of those groups and apostolates see a corresponding spike in involvement among parishioners, and to foster new ministries to emerge as well.

The big question that I know many of us have is what is the status of the old convent building. The parish does not own it, but I have had conversations with the current owner, who is a parishioner, and it is my sincere hope that we will arrange to purchase it in the near future. This was a project that Msgr. Young and I discussed during the transition from his retirement to my arrival, and something that the administration of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston has also been involved in. As you might imagine, there are a number of hoops and hurdles to clear to make it a reality, so I ask for your patience. I promise to keep you updated along the way.

With all things related to our buildings and grounds, it is important that we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. Facilities are certainly needed for a parish to operate, and they will come in due time, but they all must come in service to our worship of God and mission to the world. Let's place a renewed emphasis on being present and praising God in the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist, and then, having been fed at His table of both word and sacrifice, we will go forth renewed as a people of God. From there, we'll find a place to meet!

Peace, Fr. Sean