

Do you remember when you were beginning to learn how to read and write?

I remember those Alphabet cards that were posted in the classroom. On these cards were the cursive version of the capital and small letters. When I started writing, my handwriting was absolutely horrible. I mean, I could read it, so what was the problem? But then, I didn't want to get that nasty N on my report card for "needs improvement," so I practiced and practiced.

Everyone in the class learned the same way, but we didn't all end up with the same handwriting style. I would venture to say that there are some people here who probably should continue to practice, huh? And when it comes to signatures, well that's a whole other story.

I'm sure that you've seen some really old documents, such as the handwritten version of the Declaration of Independence, or even some of our really old church registers. It's difficult to decipher some the words on the page, because of a much more elaborate style of cursive writing. Even though they used the same 26 letter alphabet those many years ago, it can take a lot of extra study to try to make out what the words are.

Everyone of us has a certain writing on our hearts. Listen to what we find in the letter to the Hebrews, Chapter 8, vs. 10:

The Lord declares:

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel

I will put my laws into their minds,

And write them on their hearts,

and I will be their God,

and they shall be my people.

Yes, God has written a message on our hearts. The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it this way: “The desire for God is written in the human heart.”

It is common to every one of us. God has written the law of love onto all of our hearts. God desires a really deep and personal relationship with every one of us.

A group of parishioners who love their Catholic faith and love this parish has set out on a journey with me in what we call parish transformation. We meet every 2 weeks. Why “Parish Transformation?” Well, good question. I believe that God continually calls us to a deeper and deeper relationship with Him. And, I know that we all want to be in heaven for all eternity. God calls every one of us into personal conversion. In the words of Matthew Kelly, ARE we the best-version-of-ourselves, both individually AND as a parish? Hence, the process of parish transformation.

If you check the parish website, you’ll see a tab entitled Parish Transformation, and you can follow along there. For those of you who are not computer savvy, we are setting up an area in the narthex entitled “Ask Me About Parish Transformation” so that everyone has access to this exciting journey that we are on.

Any transformation actually begins first with the individual, and then spreads out into the community of faith. Today I am starting a series known as Visioning Homilies. I want to see if we can, first of all, find that message within us, and, secondly, read and ponder that message. What has God written on our hearts?

This transformation journey is inspired by a book I discovered a few years ago, written by a Canadian priest. His name is Father James Mallon. The book is entitled “Divine Renovation.” I invite you to read the book. “Divine Renovation” by Father James Mallon. God is always calling us more deeply into a relationship with him, both personally, and, as a community of faith. Saint Joseph’s is a very large parish, with a lot going for it. Our parish transformation process is meant to help everyone here find their place not only with God, but within our community of faith. In our mission statement we “strive to foster the presence of Christ, and grow disciples for the Lord Jesus.” We want to make sure that we are carrying out our mission as a faith

community. As this process unfolds in the weeks and years ahead, we will continue to follow the vision that I truly believe God wants for us.

During the course of this journey, you'll be hearing terms like "Evangelization," "Mission," "Maintenance," "Discipleship." I will expand upon these terms at various points on this journey.

Today, we'll be learning a Greek word. This vision for our parish transformation has as its basis that message that God has written on our hearts. In the world of theology, this is what is called, in Greek, the KERYGMA. K-E-R-Y-G-M-A. KERYGMA is translated as PROCLAMATION. The KERYGMA is the most basic Christian message. It has to do with our relationship with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

Pope Francis describes the KERYGMA in 4 parts. It goes so much deeper than rules and regulations. The KERYGMA is the message that the Apostles proclaimed as the early Church grew. This is the message that serves as the foundation for the program we offer here, ALPHA. This is the message that we Catholics can always immerse ourselves into more deeply, especially when we face doubts and confusion. And so, as we begin this process of parish transformation, let's know, understand and build upon the foundation that we all have.

This is the KERYGMA:

1. The most basic doctrine of our faith is that **God is love**. While God is the creator of the universe, God is a most personal God. This personal, loving God was so focused on me when God created me, that God intentionally brought me into existence. God knit us together in our mothers' wombs, as we hear so beautifully in Psalm 139. Just think about that. When every one of us was created, God focused exclusively on ME. Isn't that overwhelming? God specifically loved me into existence, and no matter what I do in my life, God loves me, and will never stop loving me.
2. Secondly, while each of us is created in the image and likeness of this loving God, each one of us has fallen. We are all affected by Original Sin. We are

sinful. Yet, God still loves us. Our loving God is a merciful and compassionate God.

3. Thirdly, Jesus, the Son of God, is our Savior. Jesus Christ is the face of mercy. We sinful human beings are all in need of salvation. The Son of God came to rescue us from this sinfulness.

4. Finally, each one of us needs to make a choice. We must make a decision as a Christian. I must live for Jesus. My life must give testimony to Jesus. Often times we give witness to ourselves. Pride takes over, and I start giving myself the credit for the blessings and talents I have. But we must give witness to something greater than ourselves. This can only be to the one who has saved me. When I am being a true witness, people will notice and say that there is something different about me, that the way I live my life is different. People will want to see what animates my life. People see the fruits of the Holy Spirit in us.

Simply put, this is the KERYGMA that is written on each of our hearts: God loves me, sinful as I am. He sent his Son to save me. Now, I must choose to live my life for God.

In the Scriptures today we hear the prophet Jeremiah, who was persecuted because of his mission, tell us that the Lord is with him, like a mighty champion. In the midst of his difficulties and terrible sufferings, Jeremiah says, "Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord, for he has rescued the life of the poor."

Saint Paul reminds us today that death came because of Original Sin, but God gave us the gracious gift of the one man, Jesus Christ. Here we clearly see Saint Paul preaching the KERYGMA, the basic message of our faith.

We hear Jesus telling us, "Do not be afraid. Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father." Jesus is calling us to make that choice. To acknowledge Him in everything we do and are. Do you see how the KERYGMA is woven through so much of what we hear every Sunday at Mass? This KERYGMA is meant to animate our lives, that all we do and all we are is for the Lord Jesus. We would do well to ask ourselves this question: Is everything I do, what I do, how I do it, is it all for the Lord Jesus?

Again, this is the basic proclamation of our Christian faith: God loves me, sinful as I am. He sent his Son to save me. Now, I must choose to live my life for God.

The next parts of this visioning homily series will deal with being a disciple of the Lord Jesus. Since next weekend is a holiday weekend, I will continue the series the week after that.

In the meantime, check out the Parish Transformation tab on the website, where these homilies will be posted. Check out our new FaceBook page and help us spread the word about our parish by liking us on FaceBook. Stop by the Parish Transformation table in the narthex after Mass.

Over the next week or 2, reflect on that moment when God created you, loved you into existence, and how God continues to be head over heels in love with you.

AND, please pray for this process. The most important part of any journey is prayer. Your prayers mean a lot, and I know that they will assist us as we all grow as our Lord's disciples, and seek to become the best version of ourselves, on the way to the Kingdom of Heaven.