

By show of hands: How many of you are already finished with your Christmas shopping? You'll notice that mine is not raised.

How many of you at least started your Christmas shopping? This is where I raise my hand.

How many of you have done nothing yet? It's too early to think that far ahead, huh? After all, we haven't even celebrated Thanksgiving. There's time, there's time.....

Some like to really be on top of things and get it done. Others, well, they tell themselves that there is always enough time to do what needs to be done, and so they put it off until the last minute. We normally call this "procrastination."

Jesus tells a parable today about wedding attendants: some who are prepared, and some who procrastinate, and when the bridegroom finally arrives, some find themselves either in, or locked outside. The story takes place around a wedding feast, which is meant to symbolize heaven. The late hour symbolizes the end of time. The Bridegroom, of course, is Jesus Himself. The two different groups represent those who used their time well while on earth, and will be invited into heaven, or, they failed to prepare, they procrastinated, and will be locked outside, left in the darkness that symbolizes hell.

This parable focuses on the sense of urgency we all need to have in order to make sure that we are not procrastinating when it comes to our lives of faith. Are we engaged in our spiritual lives, or do we procrastinate? I know that we all want to be ready for that time when Jesus will call us into the next life. We don't know when that will happen, and so we need to do our part with the time we are given on earth.

This is the second of two homilies in this set of visioning homilies. As I said last week, I look forward to seeing our parish continue to build upon the wonderful things happening here, things that enhance your lives as Catholic Christians.

Last weekend I shared what we've done so far with our "Parish Transformation Process." If you missed that, the homily is available on the parish website. Today I want to talk about where we would like to go with this process. Our process is inspired by the book Divine Renovation by Father James Mallon, which I find fascinating. When we look at the secular culture we face, parishes need to do something to respond to the ever-changing needs in our world and in the community around us.

Among the next steps in the process is to turn our attention to how we "do" Parish Council, following diocesan guidelines and ideas found in Divine Renovation. The Council will base all of its work on our Parish Mission Statement, that of fostering the presence of Christ, and growing disciples for the Lord Jesus. The first goal is to come up with a Parish Vision Statement, and talk about a 5-year plan. The task of the Parish Council is to help me vision for our future. I soon hope to put a call out to anyone in the parish who is interested in helping with this vision, and, after prayer, discussion and discernment, we'll see how your specific gifts and talents can be best put to use either on the Council, or elsewhere in our parish ministries. As I mentioned last week, the ultimate goal is for us to become the best version of a parish, and the Pastoral Council will be integral to that. And so I ask you to give this some prayerful consideration as that part of Parish Transformation moves along. What talents do you have to share with us, so that we have that best version of a Parish Council?

Another aspect of Parish Transformation is to look at who we are and what we do, to evaluate that, and see if we are doing it the best way we can. This includes our weekend experience – the way we celebrate the Mass, from how we greet people at our doors and

make them feel welcome, to the types of music we sing, to how we pray as a congregation. We'll discuss how homilies can better assist your spiritual growth. We will be looking at the types of ministries and activities we offer here, to see how they measure up to the Lord's Great Commission to make disciples. Being Catholic also means that we have to learn to steer the lifeboat we are in and go beyond ourselves to seek out and care for those members who are not very engaged. Being Catholic also means inviting those who have not yet experienced our Christian faith. This means that we will continue to offer the Alpha Program on a regular basis. We are very, very blessed to have Saint Joseph School, and strong Religious Education and Adult Formation Programs. We want to make sure that these programs continue to grow disciples for the Lord Jesus, and that every member has a strong sense of **belonging** here at Saint Joseph's.

To be a member of our parish is to enter into a relationship with the other members of this parish who are also on a spiritual journey. We foster that sense of belonging because that is what Jesus wants of His Church. And for us to have a healthy relationship with each other, there are expectations for all involved.

For instance, you as a member of this parish come here looking for meaningful and uplifting liturgies. You want to grow spiritually and become more and more the person God created you to be, especially as you participate in the Eucharistic celebration. You want your talents to be recognized and put to use for the building up of God's Kingdom. You want this parish to be a place where you will be loved, and supported, and listened to. You expect that your financial contributions will be honored with transparency and accountability. These are some of the usual expectations that a parishioner of any parish has, and our Parish Transformation Process will help us make sure that the staff, Pastoral Council and I are doing our best for you in these areas.

But there are also things that this parish should be able to expect from you, since you are a vital member of this community of faith. Those expectations? To worship here regularly on weekends; to grow in your faith; to serve your brothers and sisters with the talents God has given you; to connect to the rest of your parish family; and to give to the financial support of this parish. Again, these are all part of what it means to belong, to be part of a healthy community of faith.

It is my hope that our Parish Transformation Process will enable us to be counted among the wise who are filling our lamps with the oil we need, so that we will be able to enter into the Eternal Wedding Feast that Jesus has prepared for us.

It is my hope that we will all allow the Lord Jesus, our best and most loving friend, to have that place within our hearts, and, as He transforms every one of us, we in turn will transform the world.

It is my hope that we will be disciples fully engaged in our faith, busy about our Master's business, as we continue to follow the path of light that leads to the Eternal Wedding Feast.