

Saint Bernadette Parish

1343 Wheeling Road NE
LANCASTER, OH 43130-8701
(740) 654 • 1893

Saint Mary Parish

602 Marietta Street
BREMEN, OH 43107
(740) 569 • 7929

stbernadetteparish.net



the Healing of Naaman the Syrian in the River Jordan

an enamel plaque dating from 1150

A story told in today's Scripture reading

But his servants came up and reasoned with him.

"My father," they said, "if the prophet had told you to do something extraordinary, would you not have done it?"

All the more now, since he said to you, 'Wash and be clean,' should you do as he said."

the 28th Sunday in the Year

OCTOBER 9, 2016

October is Respect Life Month

Pray that we may, in public policy as well as in our personal attitudes and moral behavior, return to an unflinching respect for the sacred dignity of all human life, from conception to natural death.

these parishes

AT BOTH PARISHES			
Fr Thomas Kessler	pastor	(614) 634-0499	<i>wmthomaskessler@icloud.com</i>
Kathy Kehnast	pastoral coordinator	(740) 654-1893	<i>stbermparish@yahoo.com</i>
Angie & Kent Kerns	religious education	(740) 654-2588	<i>kwkerns@gmail.com</i>
Julie & Chase Stalford	youth ministry	(740) 808-7294	<i>maristellaspirt@gmail.com</i>
Nikki Schmelzer	bookkeeper	(740) 654-1893	<i>businessmstbparish@yahoo.com</i>
AT BREMEN ST MARY PARISH			
Ben Factor	liturgical music		<i>b_factor@lancaster.k12.oh.us</i>
Jim Schmelzer	maintenance chair	(740) 215-3894	
Tyna Fox-Schmelzer	religious education	(614) 371-7702	<i>schmelifox@earthlink.net</i>
Bremen St Vincent de Paul		(740) 569-3710	
The St Mary Parish office is at the church vestibule.			
Hours are 9-11 AM, Tu	602 Marietta St, Bremen, OH 43107	(740) 569-7929	
AT ST BERNADETTE PARISH			
Deacon Mark Scarpitti		(740) 438-3970	<i>dcn.mark@frontier.com</i>
Deacon Jeff Carpenter		(740) 681-9918	<i>carpenter.277@osu.edu</i>
Ann Essman	pastoral minister	(740) 653-9347	<i>aessman001@att.net</i>
Steve Huber	facilities coordinator	(740) 654-3137	<i>shuber57@yahoo.com</i>
Liz Latorre	liturgical music	(740) 243-1872	<i>lizlatorre@gmail.com</i>
The St Bernadette Parish office is in the Mary Good Center, across the back parking lot from the school.			
Hours are: 9 AM-1 PM, M W Th F; 11 AM-1 PM, Tu	1343 Wheeling Rd NE, Lancaster, OH 43130		
AT ST BERNADETTE SCHOOL			
Pam Eltringham	principal	(740) 654-3137	<i>peltring@cducation.org</i>
Barb Huber	secretary	(740) 654-3137	<i>bhuber@cducation.org</i>
Saint Bernadette School is at 1325 Wheeling Rd, Lancaster, OH 43130-8701 <i>stbermlan@cducation.org</i> www.stbernadetteschool.com			

the sacramental life

BAPTISM

To have a child baptized, you must register and attend a class as a couple (unless attendance just isn't possible, in which case some discussion with Kathy Kehnast will be necessary). Sessions are held quarterly for both parishes. The next session will be **Wednesday, Oct 19. Take the class before your child is born.** If you are expecting, call Kathy to register for the class.

Please don't ask if you "have to go." This is an opportunity to meet with parents of children about the same age as your little one; they are in the same wonderful boat as you are.

At least one parent must be a practicing Catholic. **Both godparents need to be practicing Christians, at least one a practicing Catholic.** If you don't attend **Sunday Mass regularly**, there is something you can do about it: Start coming to Sunday Mass. If you can't come (health, severe weather, employment requirements, etc.), speak to your confessor. He will help you.

PENANCE

The priest is available for Penance

1. at St Bernadette Saturdays at 3 PM and Thursdays at 5:30 PM, and
2. at St Mary Bremen on Sunday at 8 AM.

In addition to Advent and Lenten Penance Services, every Catholic priest is available whenever there is a need. There are Penance opportunities for parochial school children **four times during the year so that they will learn the beauty**

of frequent confession. The Church's law requires us to receive the sacrament of Penance at least once a year.

ANOINTING AND CARE OF THE SICK

The Sick receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick **when dangerously ill, facing major surgery, or suffering from the ravages of old age.**

We celebrate the sacrament communally at a Sunday Mass before Advent and during the Easter season so that we can all pray with you for "health of mind and body."

And, we are happy to bring Penance, Anointing, and Holy Communion to the homes or hospitals of the sick or shut in. It is very helpful to **call the parish office to let us know before a hospitalization or when it has been too long** since the sacraments were last available.

HOLY MATRIMONY

Couples wishing to marry sacramentally should contact the parish office six months before they wish to celebrate the sacrament. Why so long? **Because this sacrament, not just the ceremony, requires serious preparation.** And the Church needs to be involved in that preparation. She tries to support couples through the years of their married life. For this reason our diocese offers programs to enhance married life. To learn how, watch the weekly bulletin.

let us pray together

FOR THE 28th SUNDAY

May your grace, O Lord, we pray, at all times go before us and follow after and make us always determined to carry out good works.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

WITH POPE FRANCIS IN OCTOBER

His universal intention is:

That the countries which take in a great number of displaced persons and refugees may find support for their efforts which show solidarity.

His evangelization intention is:

That within parishes, priests and lay people may collaborate in service to the community without giving in to the temptation of discouragement.

Mass times and intentions

at St Bernadette		at St Mary	
4 PM	Thomas Stover	Saturday, Oct 8	
		Sunday, Oct 9	8:30 AM for the people
11 AM	for the people	Sunday, Oct 9	
8:20 AM	Helen Henry	Monday, Oct 10	
		Tuesday, Oct 11	8:20 AM Msgr Thomas Bender
8:20 AM	Pete Konkler	Wednesday, Oct 12	
6 PM	deceased members of Sevigny family	Thursday, Oct 13	
8:20 AM	Margaret Kessler	Friday, Oct 14	
4 PM	for the people	Saturday, Oct 15	
		Sunday, Oct 16	8:30 AM for the people
11 AM	for the people	Sunday, Oct 16	

both parishes

in your charity

Please pray for the repose of the soul of **Gladys McAndrews**, who died recently. She was the grandmother of Monica Ewing, Marri McAndrews, and Mitzi Neighbor of St Bernadette Parish.

extraordinary ministers

We inadvertently neglected to name two of the renewed Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion whom Bishop Campbell has reappointed, and who will be **commissioned** next Sunday at Mass. We apologize to **Mary Guinan** and **Paul Lonergan**, who have served long and faithfully and who we hope will continue to serve long and faithfully.

All of our extraordinary ministers exercise this ministry at the **appointment of the bishop** of the diocese. And they are only ministers for their own parish. They know not to present themselves to other parishes to give the Blessed Sacrament in other circumstances. (The exception to this rule is the other parish served by the pastor.) Similarly, extraordinary ministers from other parishes, or those whose two-year warrant from the bishop for service in this ministry has expired, are not ministers of the sacrament. The pastor can make an exception in emergency circumstances.

When it is possible for them to do so, we ask that the extraordinary ministers of holy Communion who will take Holy **Communion to the sick** present themselves to the priest celebrant **at the conclusion of the reception of the sacrament by the congregation at Mass**. They should have presented the pyx (the small sacred vessel for carrying the Lord) to the celebrant before Mass.

We must not treat the reception of Holy Communion as a self-serve or carry out order. When the minister receives the pyx she / he should **proceed to the door of Church and wait for the conclusion of the Mass and then go directly to the sick**, whether in the hospital, nursing home, or home. It is not a time for small talk, listening to the car radio, or the like.

church is a place to pray

Socialize outside. Our church is always a place for prayer. Even when Mass is over and we are exiting. **Keep it a place of silence.** Visit aloud after you have gotten outside. That way, you will be **respecting the awesome and continuing presence of**

Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, reserved in the tabernacle. And you will be respecting the people who are trying to make a prayer of thanksgiving. It matters. If that respect disappears, Catholic Faith will be lost.

strengthening the household of faith

Jesus asks us to demonstrate our love for him through our generosity to others. In our everyday lives, he calls us to share our gifts of time, talent and treasure with others. "While we have the opportunity, let us do good to all people—but especially to those of the household of the faith." (Galatians 6:10)

st bernadette

youth choir

The Saint Cecilia Society (our parish youth choir) begins its sixth season on Sunday, Oct 30, at 6 PM in the church. All parish students in grades 2-8 (public, parochial, or home school) are invited to join. SCS members in grades 4-8 are also invited to be members of the Handbell Ensemble, which meets on Sunday evenings at 7 PM, immediately after the full SCS meeting. The Handbell Ensemble will have a special workshop on Sunday, Oct 23, from 6:30-8 PM. Mrs Latorre is happy to answer questions and provide registration materials after Mass, or you may call or text her at (740) 243-1872.

adult choir

St Augustine once said, "He who sings, prays twice." The St Bernadette Adult Choir begins practicing for the new church year on Wednesday, Oct 26, at 7 PM in the church. Our adult choir is both a vocal ensemble devoted to making beautiful music for the Lord and a small faith family within our parish. We would love to welcome some new members into our family. Please consider membership in the choir as an opportunity for you to get involved in the parish and grow in your faith. Contact Liz Latorre either in person after Mass or call/text at (740) 243-1872 if you have any questions.

jillian's dinner

The 16th annual Jillian's Memorial Dinner will be held from 5-7:30 PM on Saturday, Oct 22, at St. Bernadette Church. This dinner raises money **to assist a family from our area who are suffering** catastrophic illness, the loss of a loved one, or some

such **major adversity**. This year's recipient is Monica Dickson Hoover, who is suffering from neuroendocrine carcinoid cancer. She is raising a 12-year-old daughter and they are parishioners of St Joseph Church in Sugar Grove. Proceeds of the dinner and the silent auction held during the meal will help offset her medical expenses. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children; carry-out meals are available. For information call Kathy Wagner at 687-0504 or the St Bernadette Parish office at 654-1893.

announcing : walking with purpose

If you are interested in meeting with a group of women to explore your Catholic faith, consider joining **Walking with Purpose** at St Bernadette. The first course is a six-week faith-sharing session based on the book, **Walking with Purpose: Seven Priorities that Make Life Work**. This will serve as an introduction to the Walking with Purpose program and focus on discovering the keys to **living a busy life with inner calm**. Groups will meet weekly at the Mary Good Center starting Wednesday, Oct 19, for the morning sessions (offering childcare) and Thursday, Oct 20, for the evening sessions. **Walking with Purpose** aims to bring women to a deeper personal relationship with Christ. The personal study and group discussions help to link our everyday challenges with solutions given to us through the teachings of Christ and the Catholic Church. Cost is \$10. To learn more, come to the Mary Good Center on October 19 at 9:30 AM or October 20 at 7 PM. For questions or to register, call the parish office at (740) 654-1893 or contact Amy Woo at afachting@yahoo.com or (740) 277-7922. For general program information, visit www.walkingwithpurpose.com.

friends forever

The Friends Forever group travels to Utica on Thursday, Oct 20, to visit **Ye Olde Mill** and the **Velvet Ice Cream factory** where they will enjoy lunch together. Car pool from St Bernadette departs at 10 AM. Call Ann Essman at (740) 654-1893 for details.

psr classes at st bernadette

St Bernadette PSR has begun but it is not too late to enroll students. Just a reminder: Catholic parents have a **solemn moral duty** to see that their children are properly and completely instructed in the Catholic Faith. And they have a duty to see that their children attend every week (barring health or weather deterrents). And children will find **getting to know Jesus and his Church to be an irreplaceable and joy-filled part of their upbringing**.

parish contributions

The **St Bernadette offertory** for Oct 2 came to \$8,867.

bremen st mary

prayer for a dear friend

Ann VanAtta is very ill and your prayers for her are appreciated. You could also send a card to: Ann VanAtta c/o Lori Stradley, 10651 Martinsburg Rd, Utica, Ohio 43080

parish support

The **St Mary offertory collection** for Oct 2 came to \$4,687.

bremen food pantry

The Bremen Food Pantry **needs margarine or butter**. Donate at the refrigerator in our kitchen. The Food Pantry will have an **open house** at the Bremen Methodist Church on Walnut St on

Saturday, Oct 29, from 9-11 AM. **Any family in need** can come by there that morning for food assistance; no registration or sign up is needed.

st vincent de paul

Thank you for your donations of \$767 last Sunday. Please continue to be generous in your support. The next St Vincent de Paul meeting will be on Tuesday, Oct 18, at 7 pm. New members are always welcome.

in the diocese of columbus

protecting God's children

Our Lady of Mt Carmel Parish offers a Protecting God's Children session on Sunday, Oct 16, from 5-8 PM. A light supper will be served. Register at www.virtusonline.org and click on First Time Registrant. For questions, call Leslie Niedzielski or Pam Klein at (740) 928-3264.

family rosary day

Our Diocesan Family Rosary Day will be celebrated this year at 3 PM today, Sunday, Oct 9, at St Joseph Cathedral. This liturgy, presided over by Bishop Frederick Campbell, is an opportunity to **enjoy community, worship God, and ask our Blessed Mother's intercession** for the needs of God's people. All are welcome.

Sacred Heart congress

The 5th annual Sacred Heart Congress will be Saturday, Oct 15, at St Matthew Church in Columbus from 7 AM to 1 PM. It features Timothy O'Donnell, president of Christendom College; Fr Stash Dailey, spiritual director of Sacred Heart Columbus and administrator of Holy Family Parish; and Fr Ted Sill, pastor of St Matthew. A free-will offering will be taken. For information and registration visit www.sacredheartcolumbus.org.

interactive weekend retreat for men

The Catholic Laymen's Retreat League sponsors this retreat with the theme **The 4 Last Things: Judgment, Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven**, directed by Father John D Corbett, OP, on Nov 4-6, at St Therese Retreat Center in Columbus. A contribution of \$130 covers the cost. Contact Dave Mignerey at (614) 392-0146 for information or reservations, or visit www.retreatleague.org.

catholic youth summer camp

Catholic Youth Summer Camp is Ohio's one week-long residential high adventure camp for students entering grades 6-12. Activities typically include jet skis, water tubing, paintball, blobbing, high ropes, archery tag, zip lining, rock climbing, giant swing, and mountain boarding. CYSC offers a **truly Catholic and safe environment with daily catechesis that awakens faith and builds missionary disciples**. A week at camp includes daily Mass, adoration, reconciliation, small group conversations, worship, service and authentic community. Go to www.cysc.com for information and to register for 2017 dates: high school sessions run the weeks of June 11, 18, 25, and July 2; middle school sessions run the weeks of July 9, 16, 23, and 30. Registration is open now.

marian dinner

In order to better **foster dedication to consecrated religious life among women** of the Diocese of Columbus, Bishop Campbell hosts the annual Marian Dinner at 6 PM on

Wednesday, Oct 26, at St Andrew Church's Bryce Eck Center, with presentations by Bishop Campbell and Sr. Sharon Baldy, SCN. Call (614) 224-2251 for information or to register for this evening of prayer, friendship, learning, and discerning about vocations for women.

retrouvaille

If your marriage is troubled and stressed, unloving or uncaring; if you have grown cold and distant; if you are separated, or are thinking about it, don't give up. **Retrouvaille** (a French word that means "rediscovery") is a **program to help heal and support** married couples experiencing difficulties, loneliness or pain. It is also for separated or divorced couples wanting to try again. For information call (614) 296-9704 or visit www.retrouvaille.org.

happily ever after ... despite the rough spots

Join us for a Marriage Encounter weekend and learn ways to use your marriage's ups and downs to deepen your love for each other and for God. Why not **try a Worldwide Marriage Encounter weekend**? The next weekends in central Ohio are Nov 11-13 and Feb 17-19. For information or to register, contact Paul or Marilou Clouse at (614) 834-6880 or visit www.wmcecolumbus.org.

in the deanery

employment opportunity

St Joseph Church in Circleville, Ohio, is hiring a **full-time (30/week) parish secretary**. For information, visit <http://www.saintjosephcircleville.com/employment-opportunities/> or contact the parish office: office@saintjosephcircleville.com or (740) 477-2549, x300.

cemetery sunday and cemetery flowers

Cemetery Sunday is a time of prayer for our beloved dead. It will be observed this year on October 30

- at **St Mary Cemetery** at 1:30 PM, weather permitting, and
- at **Sacred Heart Cemetery** at 1 PM (if weather doesn't permit, we pray at the shelter at Schmelzer's Grove).

All are welcome to both services.

In both cemeteries **artificial flowers**, including stone top arrangements, are permitted from Nov 1 until Mar 1. Thank you for your cooperation. Thank you for helping keep our cemeteries **places** of respect and Resurrection faith.

thanksgiving eve party

The Chuck Rogers Memorial Fund and Fisher Catholic invite you to a fun evening **to kick off your Thanksgiving weekend**. **Join Fisher Catholic alumni and friends** on Wednesday, Nov 23, from 7 PM until midnight at FC Alumni Hall. Local band Bad Influence will rock the place with live music. Food and legal beverages available. If you would like to help sponsor this free event contact Jim Faulkner at (614) 284-9369 or Jfaulk51@hotmail.com.

around and about

get the daily readings at Mass

Yes, you can have the daily readings at Mass **sent to your email every morning**. Just go to USCCB.org, select "readings", then scroll down to the tan box, sign on. It's free. But it's valuable.

new EWTN programming

Join EWTN to celebrate **the 100th Anniversary of Fatima**. All season long, hear new programs, updates and information and see a host of photo galleries based on the young Fatima visionaries, apparitions and message from our Blessed Mother. Go to www.ewtn.com for complete information.

catholic faith-based volunteer programs

Would you like to make a difference in your community, the country, or the world? Do you want to serve those in need and work for social justice? Check out **response 2017**, a free guide **listing nearly 200 faith-based volunteer programs and thousands of opportunities**. Volunteers serve full-time for periods of one week to one year or more across the US and in more than 100 countries worldwide. Summer opportunities are also available. Volunteers are from all walks of life—from high school to senior citizens. Contact Catholic Volunteer Network to receive your free copy/copies of *Response 2017*. Call (800) 543-5046 or email info@catholicvolunteernetwork.org. You can also search **Response 2017** online at www.catholicvolunteernetwork.org.

my house columbus

Pornography is a plague. 56% of divorce cases involve one party having an obsessive interest in pomographic websites. **What can we do** about this plague? It's a sin and sinners can go to Confession. And there is My House of Columbus. Visit **My House Columbus.org** or call them on their confidential hotline at (888)989-9886.

being a catholic citizen

register so that you can vote

Don't complain about it. Vote about it. Become informed and pray for guidance. There is a process for voting absentee for people who are shut in (or are likely to be shut in or travelling on election day). So you can vote without ever leaving your home. It has become possible to vote at the Board of Elections prior to election day. Early voting is better than not voting. **Registration must be done by Oct 11**. Election Day is Tuesday, Nov 8. You can go either in person at the Fairfield County Board of Elections, 951 Liberty Drive in Lancaster (off West Fair Ave) or to <http://www.fairfieldelections.com> or www.myohiovote.com.

respect life month

october is respect life month

Moved by Mercy is the theme of the 2016 Respect Life Program. The Catholic Church has long held October as a month for prayerfully remembering our firm belief that all life is **sacred**. Saint John Paul II wrote in his Encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*:

"The family proclaims life when parents teach children to communicate openly, to value all life and to fulfill their belief that **all human life is** God-given mission. The family celebrates life through prayer, thanking God for the gift of life and for each other. The family serves life by promoting the welfare and well-being of its own members and the members of the greater 'family of life.'"

For information, contact the diocesan Office for Social Concerns at (614) 241-2540. Visit the U.S. Catholic Bishops' website at www.usccb.org/prolife.

pancake breakfast at fisher catholic

The Fisher Catholic Irish4Life Club is hosting a series of pancake breakfasts **to raise money for the annual March for Life in Washington DC in January**. They are an organization of young people who willingly stand up in defense of the

inherent dignity of every human life. The next breakfast will be on Sunday, Oct 23, from 8:30-1:30 in the Fisher Catholic cafeteria. They will have blueberry, chocolate chip, and regular pancakes along with sausage, OJ, milk, and coffee. Please support our young people. The cost is your generous donation.

ministrs at Mass at st bernadette					
	lector	servers	extraordinary ministrs of Holy Communion		
Saturday, Oct 8 4 PM	Teresa Scarpitti	Mallory, Mason & McKenzie Ortiz	Joyce Guenther Lee Guinan	Kathy Kehnast Jim Kuhn	Becky Kuhn Sandy Landefeld
Sunday, Oct 9 11 AM	Dennis Forquer	Brooke, Bryson & Zachary Vogel	Nancy Griffith Larry Sanford	Anna Seigny David Shonk	Becky Wickham Amy Woo
Monday, Oct 10 8:20 AM	Mary Jane Vajen	Joey Mannella, Lexi Utz		Pat Dreyer	Kathy Kehnast
Wednesday Oct 12 8:20 AM	Bob Christy	Carley Matson, Sarah Woo		Mary Guinan	Mary Jane Vajen
Thursday, Oct 13 6 PM	Kathy Kehnast	Becca Fuller, Gunner Robertson		Lee Guinan	Paul Lonergan
Friday, Oct 14 8:20 AM	Jim Merk	Jack Gentile, Mitchell Ortiz		Jim & Rita Merk	
Saturday, Oct 15 4 PM	Sandy Landefeld	Abby, Mary & Sam Frazier	Marguerite Grimm Brad Rider	Teresa Scarpitti Craig Shaw	Mickey Steyaert Kathy Wagner
Sunday, Oct 16 11 AM	Bob Christy	Collin & Emma McCrady, Caroline Messerly	Pat Dreyer Patrick Gins	Jim Merk Rita Merk	Jean Robertson Mary Jane Vajen

ministrs at Mass at bremen st mary					
	lector	servers	extraordinary ministrs of Com munion	gifts	sacristan / usher
Sunday, Oct 9 8:30 AM	Jeanne Schmelzer	Regan Conrad, Isaac Schmelzer	Pam Redding, Angi Skinner Tyna Schmelzer-Fox,	Maurice Schmelzer family	Jim Schmelzer
Sunday, Oct 16 8:30 AM	Barb Van Fossen-Cook	Sydnee Rogers, Jillian Wilkinson	Damian & Deborah Schmelzer, Barb VanFossen-Cook	Catherine Noll April Schmelzer	Damian Schmelzer

confessions & weekday Mass nearby							
These times sometimes change, though, so call ahead							
parish	confessions	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
<i>Bremen St Mary</i>	8 AM Sunday		8:20 AM				
<i>Lancaster St Bernadette</i>	5:30 PM Thursday, 3 PM Saturday; 8:30 AM on 1st Sat	8:20 AM		8:20 AM	6 PM	8:20 AM	1st Sat @ 9 AM
<i>Lancaster St Mary</i>	4 PM Saturday	7 AM	9 AM	7 AM	9 AM		
<i>Lancaster St Mark</i>	5:30 PM Saturday	8 AM	8 AM	6 PM	8 AM	8 AM	
<i>Sugar Grove St Joseph</i>	½ hour before Mass	8 AM	NOON	8 AM	NOON	8 AM	
<i>Circleville St Joseph</i>	4 PM Saturday	9 AM	7 PM	9 AM		9 AM	10 AM
<i>Logan St John</i>	4 PM Saturday	8 AM	8 AM	9 AM		8 AM	9 AM

the Church's plan for reading God's word this week										
Sat	Oct 8	28th Sunday	2 Kings	5:14-17	2 Timothy	2:8-13	Psalm	98	Luke	17:11-19
Mon	Oct 10		Galatians	4:22-5:1			Psalm	113	Luke	11:29-32
Tues	Oct 11	St John XXIII	Galatians	5:1-6			Psalm	119	Luke	11:37-41
Weds	Oct 12		Galatians	5:18-25			Psalm	1	Luke	11:42-46
Thurs	Oct 13		Ephesians	1:1-10			Psalm	98	Luke	11:47-54
Fri	Oct 14	St Callistus I	Ephesians	1:11-14			Psalm	33	Luke	12:1-7
Sat	Oct 15	St Teresa of Jesus	Ephesians	1:15-23			Psalm	8	Luke	12:8-12
Sun	Oct 16	29th Sunday	Exodus	17:8-13	2 Timothy	3:14-4:2	Psalm	121	Luke	18:1-8

Being Religious and Being a Church Member

Every so often I hear people say that if you are religious it doesn't matter whether you belong to a church. The idea is that church-going and church membership is the superficial stuff, that being religious really means being spiritual and being generous to other people, but not being part of any organized body of people with a leadership and any body of customs. That perspective is pretty convincing to people nowadays, pretty widespread in our society. But I think there is more to the story than that, that **it doesn't make sense to contrast life in the Church with a truly religious life**. We Catholics believe that for Christians, **to be connected to religion is to be connected to the Church**.

It is the Church that opens up the opportunity **to be religious in the way that Jesus wants** us to and not simply in the way that you or I might design. Being in the Church is a way to see to it that we don't go off in our own ways into a religion that is designed by you or by me and reflects the truth according to ... to us—instead of **the truth according to Jesus**.

I believe that Jesus is just what he said he is: **the Way, the Truth, and the Life**. That being the case, I want to walk the way that he has taught so that I can learn the real truth and to live fully the life he brings to us. So I go to **the gospels**. Anybody can go to the gospels. But where did they come from? From God. How did any human being ever figure out that these books, from among zillions of books that have ever been written, were **written by God when he inspired human writers**? We must never forget that it was **determined by the Church that this was what was so special about these books**. And it was handed on by the teaching of the Church from the beginning and down through the centuries.

This handing on is called **tradition**. That doesn't mean the old-fashioned ways of doing things. It is rather **the holy and reliable handing on of the precious treasure of the Faith**. The first time I ever remember being connected with that tradition happened the evening my Mom made me come and learn to say a simple prayer when I was a toddler.

You might ask which church hands on this truth reliably. The answer is that it is the Church founded by Jesus Christ. And the way to figure out which one that is, is to seek the connectedness to the teaching of the apostles of Jesus through the centuries. That does not mean that the Church is made up of the best and brightest of all the Christians. Instead it is the Church that Jesus said he was going to build upon the apostle Simon Peter, his (Christ's) Church that has for its foundation the very flawed little band that Jesus chose.

Why didn't he do any better than that rag tag band of brothers? He could have chosen more talented, better-behaved foundation stone and building blocks; he could have been more inclusive—of women, of people of color, from other cultures, with better preparation. But he chose whom he chose. And that is a mystery to any thinking person.

We might say, "If he had asked me and taken my advice, the Lord would have ..." Would have what? Recognized how much wiser I am than he is? No, that won't do. If there is a question between the wisdom of the Lord and my wisdom, I had best choose his wisdom.

And there is a wisdom in the fact that **God chooses**—and keeps choosing—**the inadequate, to be his own**. God did that when he chose Abram and Moses and David. He did it when Jesus chose inadequate men to be his apostles to the world. And he does it still when he chooses the likes of you and me. A design flaw on his part it is certainly not. The designer knows what he is doing. He can and does choose the inadequate vessel, **the vessel of clay**, to carry **the precious treasure**. Perhaps he wants to teach us the beauty of the gift he is giving.

Finding that in the Church there are so many people who are so flawed can make a person ask, "Then who needs it? We'll just stick with the message." But how will anyone hear the message without the messenger? **God communicates to the world through such messengers**. They are even a part, **not the easiest part, of his message**. For he has said, in the words of Jesus, **I will build my Church**. I will build it on the likes of just such as this blustery and impetuous man Peter. This Simon Peter who Jesus knew would deny him before Peter would turn again and be ready to strengthen his brothers.

That is the shape of the Church that the Lord has built. It is a trial to those of us who, unlike Peter, are perfect. But wait ... who ever said that you or I are perfect? **It is through the imperfect, like us, that the perfect one invites other imperfect ones, like the rest of humanity, to come share his life**.

If my sins and various other inadequacies are a hindrance, two things are in order: First, we, **the Lord's messengers, should do what Jesus said, and get our house in order**; we should be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect, and stop being a stumbling block. With God's help, I am trying. Or at least I am trying on my good days. Second, **the hearers of the Lord's message should not hold their breath until they see us members of the Church be perfect**. Bad messengers notwithstanding, it is a good message, **it is the message of salvation**. And the message is **from the Lord**.

—Father Kessler

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