

THE PASTOR'S DESK

July 11, 2010 - Questions Answered



Dear Parishioners,

Before we had our open Parish Council Meeting in April, we put out a question box. We had many questions, most of which we tried to answer at the meeting. Most of the questions were of a practical nature; some were contradictory (one would ask "why don't we do A?", and then another would ask "why don't we do B?"). Some needed longer, and more considered, answers. I resolved to try to answer some of those questions that needed more consideration during this summer.

One such question was "why two churches, one English and one Spanish?" Let me begin by noting an item I saw in the newspaper today. The Diocese of Cleveland, the item noted, is closing several more parishes. These are largely ethnic parishes established by different immigrant groups during the 19th and 20th centuries. As generations pass, people move but, more importantly, the people lose their strong, ethnic identity and language. These parishes which served a particular ethnic group now are largely empty and abandoned. I remember a trip I made to Scranton, Pennsylvania. I saw a Catholic Church on almost every street corner. One was for the Irish, one for the Germans, Italians, Slovaks, Poles, etc. If you come from a city in the Northeast, you know what I'm talking about.

The largest influx of Catholics we have in this country now is from the Spanish speaking world of Central and South America. This is quite a different kind of immigration than we had in the 19th and 20th centuries. In those times, we had many immigrants from many different countries and many different language groups. Now, we have immigrants from many different countries but who speak the same language. Because of this, the Church in the United States can more easily take in and serve Hispanic immigrants without them having to establish their own parishes. We are taking in only one more language group rather than many different language groups. Because they are more easily accommodated, the Church in the United States sees more benefit in the long run in serving the Hispanic immigrants in already existing parishes rather than use resources to establish properly Hispanic parishes.

The down side of this policy is the sense that one parish in now divided into two distinct parishes. Before we bemoan this situation, realize that what separates us most from each other is language. Think of how much you can communicate with someone who does not speak your language. You can point, nod, make hand gestures, speak more loudly, but we are severely limited. That is because language provides us with the ability to speak and communicate "categorically." We can make things present in their full depth. If I wanted to communicate about my trip to Ireland, for example, if I did not speak the same language as the listener, I could point to myself and to a map of Ireland to indicate that I had gone there. But, that would be about it. But, speaking the same language, I can recount all the stories about what I saw and experienced. I could use words to bring Ireland as I experienced it to my listener. This is a much richer, and more fully human, way of expressing this experience.

Our knowledge of the faith and our worship of God depend on words. The scriptures are written, the homily is spoken, sacraments come about with words being spoken. These are realities that need to come to us, to be expressed, categorically, with the meaning and depth given to us by the grammar of human speech. This is why immigrants seek to find a place where they can worship

in their own language, whether it be an ethnic parish or in an existing parish that welcomes them. Even when the Mass was in Latin, people used missals to understand the prayers and readings in their own language, while the preaching and teaching would be done in their native language.

We should realize that we are one parish. Everyone here has the same pastor, we belong to the same Holy Church, and we profess the same faith and live in the same community. As a pastor, I have to have concern for everyone in my pastoral care. That is my main mission. This trumps even trying to create "one" parish. I have to recognize that language is one of the chief factors in dividing us one from another. We cannot allow this difference to keep us from worshiping God in the One Church. Whatever may happen in future generations, this generation needs to respond to this situation with generosity and charity.

God bless,

Fr. LaHood

A Thank You E-mail from Deacon Levy

Dear Fr. Lahood:

I would like to thank you and St. John Neumann parish for all that you have done to make my ordination possible and for the Mass of Thanksgiving and reception and the beautiful and generous gifts that you gave: namely the green deacon stole and the white dalmatic from the Vocations Committee. They are both magnificent, and I hope to serve the Lord at the altar for many years with them.

Over the years, St. John Neumann parish has formed me and graciously allowed me to serve as Acolyte in preparation for ordination. Thank you.

I also appreciate your personal support of me and my preparation for ministry and for coming to the Shrine to celebrate the Ordination Liturgy with the Archbishop.

I want to thank all those who made the reception after the Mass of Thanksgiving so beautiful and welcoming of my friends and family. St. John Neumann has a genuine gift of hospitality.

Although I have been assigned to St. Mary's Church in Rockville, all assignments are temporary, and I may return one day to serve at St. John Neumann, if it's God's will.

Shalom,

Deacon Barry