

August 2009

My dear sons and daughters in the Lord,

I have written many letters over the course of the seven years I have been privileged to be your pastor. Many were about parish concerns, and others were letters addressed to parents about school issues. Others were necessary letters reminding people of their obligation to render back fairly to the Lord for the support of His Church. Last summer, I wrote my first pastoral letter, addressed to all the members of the parish. It did not ask for money or anything else – except their attention and reflection. I wrote about the Eucharist and the central place it must play in the life of any parish.

This, my second pastoral letter, I address to the young people of our parish, especially those who are approximately high school age. I write it as a spiritual father who wishes to share his own faith and dreams with the young people whose souls are entrusted to him. I hope it will serve as a reminder that the Church has great concern for your welfare and need of your youthful zest for life, your enthusiasm and your talents.

If my pastor had written to me when I was your age, it would have been in the late 1960's (yes, it was ages ago!). And yet, there was really no reason for him to write. Even in high school, most of us attended Mass (sometimes grudgingly), we had to sell "fifty-fifty" tickets (sort of like our lotto) to help fund the part of our tuition the parish paid, and when we received report cards, we had to pick them up at the parish, and the pastor gave them to us (after carefully examining them). The parish really was a social hub for most people, especially since this was when there were only three channels on TV, music was played on a record player from vinyl records (ask your parents about them), WIBG was the rock and roll station on the radio (although the "good guys" from WFIL threatened to best them), there was no internet, Lyndon Johnson was president, Mass had only recently begun to be said in English, and Vietnam was the war in which we were engaged. This time was also just before the "sexual revolution" when traditionally accepted ways of acting were ignored and the institution of marriage was attacked by so-called "free-thinkers." So, in a lot of ways, things were simpler, and I know I did not face a tenth of the pressures and temptations you do in this modern, too-fast and sometimes-crazy world.

Still, one thing has remained unchanged through these many years: the Truth. Truth, if it really is the truth, is eternal, for God is Truth. And so, I thought that I would share with you the Truth that has sustained me for my fifty-five-plus years of life and thirty years of priesthood.

First of all, dear young people, there is a God Who loves you in a personal way. He created each of you individually, and did not want a world in which you did not exist. He has a loving plan for each of you, which you can only discern by listening to Him. I don't know if you ever heard this, but I had not planned on being a priest when I graduated high school (though the thought had attracted me while I was younger). I planned to be a Navy officer. I had won a NROTC scholarship and in September 1971 was commissioned as a midshipman in the United States Naval Reserve. After college (Villanova), I would be commissioned an officer, spend twenty years in the Navy, retire with a nice pension, and begin to teach in college. That was my plan. I truly enjoyed my first semester at Villanova, and the discipline and traditions of the ROTC. But then, I had something I hadn't had before. I had a month off between semesters. I had time to think.

In the quiet, I realized that while I was happy, I was not content. There was something else I was supposed to be doing. I asked God to show me and He did; I resigned my commission (forfeiting the much-needed scholarship), applied to the Seminary, and never looked back. Not every day as a priest has been happy, but I am always content, knowing I am doing what God had in mind for me – a perfect fit! I pray that the same contentment may be yours; spend some time each day asking God what He wants you to do. Following His direction will make you truly content.

This God loves you so much He sent His Son Jesus to die and rise for you. Jesus loves you so much He sent His Spirit on the Church, in which He continues to dwell and be present to us in Word and Sacrament. I mentioned earlier that once I got out of grade school, I went to Sunday Mass but only to avoid hassles at home. I went to the overflow Mass in the hall, stood in the back, left early (shame on me). I thought I had all the answers and the priests couldn't teach me anything I didn't know. But then, again, God intervened to show me how foolish I was. I needed a job, and all I could find was working at the church. It didn't pay much but I got to know the priests as good and hard-working men who were struggling to do God's will despite their human shortcomings, just like the rest of us. I started to see the importance of the Church and found myself hungering for the Eucharist. Even after I left high school and entered college, in the year before I went to the seminary, I discovered how much easier the rest of the week was when I gave God the first hours of the first day of the week by attending Sunday Mass. I began to learn from the homilies and the Scripture stories. I guess I grew up.

I share all this with you because I want what God wants for you: to be happy. The Truth is that we can not be truly happy without Almighty God. Please make attending Sunday Mass a priority in your week, the most important thing you do. The grateful heart realizes God gives us 168 hours each week, and only requires one back for worship. However, that isn't all we should give to God. We need to share our time and talents with the parish community. Get involved in CYO service projects, not just sports. Offer your services as readers or cantors or even ushers (some of you already do these three things and I am grateful and edified). Come to the Ministry Fair in October and see how you can get involved in your parish family.

Don't hang with anyone you'd be ashamed to bring home. Don't cloud your mind with drink or drugs—you will make bad decisions which will haunt you forever. Remember the sacredness of the gift of sex, a gift from God which only expresses its internal truth in the faithful community of life and love we call the sacrament of marriage. Be smart enough to not buy into the loose morals and atheism constantly thrown at you on TV, on the net, in movies and even in some music. Remember the fundamental Truth: God loves you and wants you to be happy, and we can only be ultimately happy by living the Ten Commandments and Jesus' Great Commandment to love God and others.

I pray for you all every day. My heart is filled with great joy when I see and speak with so many of you after Sunday Mass. My heart is heavy when I think of those I never see. Know that you are all important to me and if you ever need help, the pastoral staff and I are only a phone call away.

Our patroness, Martha of Bethany, often welcomed Jesus to her home. Through her intercession, may we all feel so welcomed in "Jesus' home" that we long to spend time there, to be nourished by the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, fed by the Word of God broken open for us, and strengthened in our bonds of unity and charity towards our brothers and sisters. And, as I daily pray, like Saint Martha, may we always be friends of Jesus.

Sincerely,

Father Al

(Rev.) Alexander Masluk
Pastor