

I've been asked if there were any words of wisdom that I would like to share with you today. I've been around for a long time, but I won't be here forever. And so I just want to take a few moments to put out on the table 5 challenges for the future. My point is not to offer solutions, but to raise issues of interest for the next administration...if and when that happens.

The first challenge involves the ministry of Hospitality. Hospitality, along with good music and good preaching is one of the 3 elements that people have consistently noted as essential to good liturgy.

Although we have a very dedicated core group of hospitality ministers who have served our community for many years they are few in numbers compared to other liturgical ministries.

Somehow we must forge new strategies for recruiting families, youth, and members of our multi-cultural communities to serve in this vital ministry.

The second challenge relates to the New Roman Missal. It is my hope that most Catholics see the introduction of the new missal and the corresponding changes to the Mass as something we welcome.

Change is always difficult and change is even more challenging when it comes to ritual prayer. As liturgical ministers we must embrace an attitude of not mere acceptance, but one of joy and hope for the precious gift of the liturgy which belongs to the entire Universal Church. Proper catechesis of the faithful on the how and the why of these changes will bear much fruit if done with diligence and devotion.

The third challenge concerns music. When you stop and think about it, each year we ask all of our music groups to cover over 300 liturgical events each year.

Musicians come and go; music groups come and go...but they are both very hard to come by. Good music is demanded of the liturgy, and without a sufficient cadre of competent and dedicated musicians the liturgy will suffer and it will suffer immensely.

I am encouraged by the growth of both our multi-cultural music groups and our young adult group. We must continue to support, nurture, encourage and welcome them into our wider music community.

The fourth challenge I will call "tradition."

Whenever there is a change in leadership there is sometimes a temptation to want to go backwards in time "to do things the way we used to do things." Whenever there are changes in leadership there is sometimes a feeling "of being free at last" and stop doing things that the old leadership introduced.

I would sincerely hope that both extremes would be avoided. As I've said many times, there is at least one luxury of being at the top of the food chain and that luxury is having the advantage of being able to see the big picture; thus enabling one to always have the best interest of the common good in mind.

And the biggest challenge of them all is Mass attendance.

When I first arrived at Holy Family in 1998, weekly Sunday Mass attendance stood at over 2,000 people a week. Some of us might even remember how the 9:30am Mass was consistently standing room only. 12 years later it has dipped into the 1700's.

I don't think there is any one clear explanation, but the one that we most often hear is that our Masses are too long. Now, we can continue to engage in a philosophical debate about the "timelessness of the liturgy," but there is a point when people will grow tired of it, and they will either go somewhere else or stop attending Mass altogether. Neither are acceptable consequences.

"A penny for your thoughts?" Well, there's my penny's worth.

I leave you with the immortal words of Joshua J. Marine who once said: "Challenges are what make life interesting; overcoming them is what makes life meaningful."