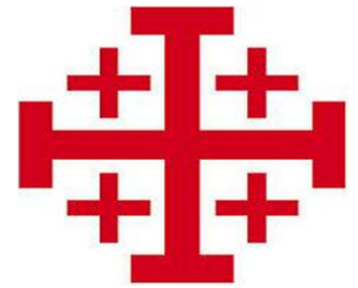


PASTOR'S CORNER



A GIFT FOR JESUS

As I mentioned in last week's *Pastor's Corner*, gift giving is a part of the Christmas Season which began with the Christmas vigil Mass on Saturday, December 24. Giving gifts for ones birthday is also a custom in our culture. Since Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Christ that makes two reasons we should give Jesus a gift on his birthday, Christmas day. We often ask the question, "What do I give to the person who has everything?" In the case of our Lord, the question is definitely true. What might I give as a gift to Jesus? Since Jesus is God and does not need or want for anything, then we must give him something from the heart, which is our love.

I believe one of the best gifts we could give to Jesus this Christmas Season, and every time we come to Mass, is to celebrate and pray the Mass with true devotion and reverence. Often as I look over the congregation I have real concerns about how some are celebrating and praying, or more accurately not celebrating and praying the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It seems people are coming to Mass late with a greater frequency. As I and the servers stand in the back of church ready to process in we have to dodge the many people coming in late. A friend of mine told me her father taught her that being late was a sign of rudeness and lack of respect.

What I find even harder to understand is why people have to leave Mass early, and often it is the same people who are late! We are only required to participate in Mass once a week, one hour out of the 168 hours of the week which God has given to us. Even if the Mass takes more than an hour, why do we have to be in such a big hurry to leave?

The Church teaches that the Mass is the source and summit of our lives. It is during the Mass that we are strengthened by Christ to be faithful Catholics in the world who are sent forth to make Jesus known. By worshipping together, we strengthen our parish community so that as the Body of Christ we can show our love for all of our brothers and sisters, those who are easy to love and those who are not. If we simply come to Mass and do not participate by praying and singing we are missing the opportunity to show our love for God and receive the gifts he wishes to give us. We need to ask ourselves if we are simply "clocking in" for Mass, fulfilling our obligation by our presence, or do we make it a sincere time of prayer and worship? Some often say to me, "Father, you really don't want to hear me sing." If you feel God has not given you a voice that you want to share in public, then at least pick up the hymnal and silently read the words of the song. St. Augustine said: "The person who sings prays twice." I would like to add to his saying, "The person who does not sing, or at least say the words quietly is not praying at all!"

Jesus doesn't need our Christmas/Birthday gift, but we need to give it to him. When we come to Mass next weekend to celebrate the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, Holy Day of Obligation, let us lift up our heart, mind, soul, and voice in praise and worship to God. Let us give this gift every time we come to Mass. It doesn't cost us anything monetarily and like most gifts we give, we will receive much more in return; true joy, peace, and happiness.