

Thirteen Years

Feast of St. John Chrysostom 2022

Dear Parishioners,

Of late I have been reflecting upon my tenure at our parish - my very first day was a chilly February 18th, 2009.

A certain number of you share the full recollection of this period. But some families' memories stretch back a half century or more into our past. You are full of stories and tales of how the Faith has grown on our little patch of God's good green Earth.

Along with that knowledge comes the appreciation of our two churches as an important part of Virginia Catholic history. You have seen all of the steady efforts we have made together to sink Catholic roots ever deeper into the soil of the Northern Neck.

It has been no simple task to maintain our presence. Many of you, comprehending this, have generously helped in myriad ways and in different time periods. But I suspect the earthly and spiritual necessities and complexities of this unique parish do escape the perception of many. I may be mistaken. There is humanity to contend with after all. The challenge is to see God's grace woven into the individual and parochial struggle rather than see the struggle alone.

I have by God's favor been admitted to many of your stories with all the accompanying joys and sorrows thereof. Would that I could recount all those tales of struggles and imperfections mixed in with your Christian perseverance and crowned by many a triumph. But they will remain *in pectore*. We would exude more charity were we to see one another as God sees us rather than beclouded by spiritual cataracts. Taking up that very task is a step towards holiness.

We are sojourners in a strange land, my friends, and it behooves us to live fully conscious of that reality. How much time is left to us and what portion of that are we willing to surrender to the darkness? *Tempus fugit, memento mori...*

Now, during these present days that have tried men's souls we find ourselves pressing forward still seeking the glory of God and the salvation of His people.

In these thirteen years new parishioners have been born into our parish whilst others have been born into life eternal and laid to rest in our graveyards awaiting resurrection. Some families have moved on, whilst newcomers have arrived. We might consider all of them to be in some sense still belonging to our parish.

I would like to express my gratitude to you, dear parishioners, fearing that I fail to do so frequently enough or with sufficient emphasis. Nevertheless, I know who you are and I know the good you do, even quietly and hiddenly, to serve the parish.

Many of you have upheld me in my time as a priest and pastor, of which half has been spent amongst you. When our paths eventually part, as they most certainly will, I will not forget your innumerable gestures of support towards me, your steadfast presence, your fidelity to praying with me at Holy Mass, nor your kind words and constant encouragement.

May God bless you, the good parishioners of our two humble little Catholic churches way out here in the Virginian Shire...

Father Francis M. de Rosa
Pastor