

TOGETHER SHARING CHRIST

Vol. 28, No. 2

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Parish Directory – Updates

Parish Directory Updates are not published in the Web version of *TSC*. For new registrations, corrections, and changes to the current directory, contact Anne Maura English.

Did you know . . .

Father Lawrence's homilies can be heard by accessing the St. V's website? The homily for the current Sunday plus archives of past Sundays and special events are available there.

Letter from the Pastor

May 5, 2008

Shalom!

It seems like this year is going faster than most. A part of that, I guess, is just because time seems to go faster as you get older. But I think it also has to do with what an early Easter we had this year. Never again in your lifetime will Easter be as early as it was this year, only one day short of the earliest it can ever possibly be. At least for us.

The Orthodox, because they never adopted the Gregorian calendar (which was for them, after all, highly suspect because of its Papal sponsorship) are eleven days earlier in their calendar than we are, and that was just enough to put them into the next month for Easter: Orthodox Easter wasn't until April 27, which feels a lot more like Easter. And Passover began April 20th, because the rabbis declared a leap month this year to get the solar and lunar calendars back on track with each other.

But for Western Christians, Catholic and Protestant alike, Easter came very early this year, and it seems as though everything is a bit ahead of schedule ever since. We've had First Communion already, and by the time you read this we will have had Pentecost, and the farewell for our graduates, and the Healing Mass. Even the Parish Retreat will be over by the first of June.

So, it feels like time to start assessing the year, even though it's only the beginning of spring. What did we accomplish this year?

Well, to start with the easy, most noticeable stuff, we got the Tower fixed. It's complete, it's gorgeous, and it's paid for (or at least it will be soon, out of the earnings of our Historic Trust Fund).

The garden that Pat Bahr renovated in honor of her mother is now nearing completion: the groundwork was done last fall, and the plantings are happening now.

I think we've come to some consensus about the park. The homeless will stay. The tents and structures will not (in fact, they're already down: now to work at keeping it that way). And we will work together with the City to provide housing opportunities for the residents of our park, and after that, other opportunities, such as treatment, job training, etc.

We've gotten a start on a revitalization of our welcoming project, with our greeters in rosettes talking to visitors and prospective new members after 9:30 Mass on Sundays, and we've got a team of folks planning what to do next. Likewise, our Pastoral Care Committee is now up and running, and planning their strategy. Both of these are initiatives that grew out of our Listening Project, which shows perhaps that though we act more slowly than we listen, eventually we do both.

And we've done all the things we do every year, and that are no less important for having to be done every year: we've educated our kids, and ourselves, we've planned and celebrated liturgies, we've fed the poor and advocated for the oppressed, we've balanced the budget and paid the bills, and we've tried to care for each other as a sign that God cares for us all.

Not bad for a few hundred folks with a very limited staff and budget and a very old home.

No time to rest on our laurels, though. We still have to provide for generational succession, not only in our leadership but even more importantly in our membership. We still have to care for two schools, a day care center, two sisters parishes, and a host of other ministries. And we still have to care for ourselves and each other in the process. So, on to next year, or maybe that should be this year, since it's still earlier than it feels.

Peace and Love,

Pastor

In Plain English

Anne Maura English

These past seven months or so have been a unique experience for me. I've been tutoring (legally I don't teach because the kids are home schooled) two days a week in a home school academy in Westminster. (That's not the unique part I meant, although working two days a week with students and structuring three days of individual learning experiences for them is a slightly new twist to my teaching career.)

What has been unique is the community I have become part of. This group is an amalgam of (what I consider) conservative Catholics and evangelical Christians. I was nervous about that, even though—precisely because of the odd religious mix—we leave all explicit religious teaching to the home school component. I know that there are aspects of my faith—my understanding of theology, my view of the papacy and the hierarchy, my belief about what the Spirit is trying to do in the Church today—that I do not share with my Catholic colleagues there and the Catholic parents of the young people I tutor. But I had worked with several of them in an 8-week workshop I ran last spring, and I genuinely liked them. So I decided to give it a try and hope for the best.

It has exceeded my most hopeful expectations. What I was unprepared for was the experience of spending two days a week embedded in a community for whom God is genuinely and explicitly part of their lives. God is not some sometime reality for these folks. They really do “live and move and have their being in” an all-loving God. They experience God's presence and activity in every aspect of their lives, 24/7. They honestly believe and *live* that whatever happens, there will be a way to find and serve God in it—and that whatever happens God will be there for them encouraging, guiding, supporting.

Now, my head could have affirmed that any time in the last several decades. It's true I don't personally ascribe to a theology which sees God as “making” things happen to me. So, it's not part of my spirituality ever to say, “well, God must have done this for a reason.” I believe God's creating is evident precisely in God's giving the world autonomy, building in a hefty dose of randomness—and I can give a credible theological grounding for that belief. I would have said—if asked—that I believe God is present to me at every moment, inspiring and offering me the opportunity to grow in love and God's own life by the choices I make about dealing with what happens. That's how I view one of my favorite quotes: “All I know of tomorrow is that Providence will rise before the sun.” Not that God will be busy at work making things happen, but will ceaselessly coax—call—“hound” me in the depths of my soul to *live* my faith, to offer the daily Eucharist of my life.

But I've been brought up short by finding myself right smack dab in the middle of a community who seem to live this in a way I don't.

My life has been touched this year by working with folks who aren't self-conscious about admitting, "I know God is going to help me work this out," *and* for whom that is not just pious lip service. My life has been touched this year by spending five or ten minutes with other tutors and parents (free once the kids have been settled in their first period classes) who gather to pray—really pray, really talk to God about the day, acknowledging God's gifts and asking for God's help with the concrete needs of *this* day. The same thing happens at the start of a "faculty meeting." It's very different from having an "opening with a prayer" at the start of a meeting or activity. I find I can't just say my "Amen" and go about business as usual; we've talked to God about this, we've brought God into this, and God persists in staying. My life has been touched this year by the genuine peace and joy I find in this group. My life has been touched by the scarcity of grouching and annoyance; faced with the kinds of situations that usually prompt these, people most often actually sit down and talk it out with each other—or roll up their sleeves and see what they can do, confident that there *is* something they can do because God is at work in our world.

I find I'm attracted to the possibility of actually *living* as a Christian in a new way. I find myself changing the way I view my daily life and myself in the day-to-day—opening myself to live wholeheartedly the beliefs I've ascribed to with my head. What would it be like to find God and live God genuinely, enthusiastically? I find myself wanting to try to find out.

To start where you are and to become aware of the connection—that was Thomas Merton's approach to prayer. "We were indoctrinated so much into means and ends," he said, "that we don't realize that there is a different dimension in the life of prayer. In technology you have this horizontal progress, where you must start at one point and move to another and then another. But that is not the way to build a life of prayer. In prayer we discover what we already have. You start where you are and you deepen what you already have, and you realize that you are already there. We already have everything, but we don't know it and we don't experience it. Everything has been given to us in Christ. All we need is to experience what we already possess. . . . The trouble is, we aren't taking time to do so."

David Steindl-Rast

Thomas Merton/Monk: A Monastic Tribute

Easter Vigil Reflections - 2008

If you are unfamiliar with St. V's Easter Vigil, we keep an all night Vigil in which we trace salvation history through scripture readings from Genesis to the wisdom literature. Each "hour" is prepared by a different person who presents the reading and psalm, and some reflection. Art, film, dance, puppetry are some of the creative ways we have found over the years to expand our understanding of the readings. Readings are followed by 35-40 minutes of quiet in which to pray, reflect, nap, or snack and socialize in the Undercroft. What follows are several of the Vigil Reflections from this year.

Genesis: Why We Left the Garden

Genesis 2:5—3. Audrey Rogers

There are two creation stories in the Torah of the Jewish Scriptures. The first we read last year. It comes out of the priestly tradition and is poetic and stately. In it, God is distant and powerful, surveying a formless void, and creating everything by simply speaking and proclaiming it good.

It is a creation story that does two things: the first for those who wrote it, and the second for us who hear it. Its ancient writers committed this story to paper after the Exile and were emphatically making the point that there was one God who created the universe, not the warring gods of the Babylonians they had heard about in captivity. On the other hand, for us, it intuitively resonates with our modern science--disciplines like geology and paleontology because we now appreciate that the world, in stages like the days of

Genesis, has slowly come to be as we now know it: the breathtaking beauty of own planet to the jaw-dropping grandeur of what lies beyond us seen only through the most powerful telescopes.

But that was last year's creation story.

This year we have Adam—and we have Eve—and we have the talking snake.

This story of creation—with these three—never happened.

It is a saga, a myth. But this does not mean that it is a story that can be easily dismissed. Almost forty years ago, Carl Jung warned that we discard the Judeo-Christian archetypes at our own peril, particularly if we do so before we fully understand them well enough to construct their replacements.

This story of creation never happened.

This story of creation ALWAYS happens.

It has happened to me, and I daresay it has happened to you.

If the first story of creation tells how the world came to be, this story tells us why we are the way we are.

In this story, creation is far from done. From the first creation story, we have this concept of the Garden being perfect *before* Adam is made. But we see in this story that on the day that Adam was created, “no plant of the field had yet sprung up-for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground” – God creates Adam and *then* plants the Garden and puts Adam in it to till it and keep it.

This is the first insight in the story: the earth remained in a pre-creation state until God created humans and gave us responsibility to bring the world forward to its fullest potential. God creates a paradise, but not something static and fixed. It is dynamic: creation is open to a number of possibilities.

There is a second insight. In this story, God is far from remote. God creates by molding, forming, planting. God is involved. But God

not only forms every creature, God brings everything – first the animals and then the woman – to the man to be named. This is a remarkable image of God because in fact God is submitting to the service of the human being, presenting creative possibilities to him. And Genesis tells us *whatever* name the man gave the creature that became its name. Phyllis Tribble notes that God, who had dominated the action up to this point, now recedes into the background of the story, “not as the authoritarian controller of events but as the generous delegator of power who even forfeits the right to reverse human decisions.”

A final insight has to do with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. There is so much that we have learned as children that we neglect to reexamine as adults when supposedly we are wiser. This is one for me. I did not realize but I probably and childishly assumed that one bite from this tree would make Adam and Eve fully aware of the Ten Commandments, probably the Commandments of the Church, and possibly even the Code of Canon Law. They would really know where the lines were. What they were supposed to have known before the bite was a thought that had never occurred to me.

However, we are told that translating the words in the tree’s name into

“good and evil” is not the only translation option; in fact another translation renders these same words not “good and evil” but “one way or the other.” The critical word in the tree’s name is actually the word “knowledge.” It comes from a verb with a specific meaning of “to know” (*yada*) that is found in two other places in the Tanakh: Deuteronomy and 2 Samuel. And in both places, it is used to specify those who are too young or too old to decide for themselves what serves their own best interests.

So the knowledge that resides in the tree is the knowledge that God possesses of what ultimately is in the very best interest of humanity. When Eve and Adam moved to eat this fruit they essentially were declaring their autonomy, their intention to decide in their own behalf, independent of God’s will. In one sense, there was no “fall” at all, not breaking a seemingly arbitrary rule, but a “jump” – Eve moved Adam and herself from the innocent trust of a kind of moral childhood into the throes of adolescence in a demand for autonomy and all that entails, particularly the sad and painful consequences of bad decisions.

So what lessons have we found in this wonderful story?

God made creation open to a number of possibilities;

God gave humanity the responsibility to bring the world to its fullest potential; God intended that responsibility to be carried out in communion with God; But we individually and collectively as families, tribes, and nations have refused to honor the limits that being a creature entails and opted instead to choose our own course and *God let us*.

It is our pinched and impoverished vision we cling to. This is the snake’s real deceit – the persistent lie we heard and continue to tell ourselves that we are absolute individuals in full and glorious control. Nonsense! We were made by a Trinitarian God whose essential relationship is the template for the universe. All creation hums with the vibration of a divine energy glowing with relationship.

One can easily reckon that if Adam and Eve never existed as actual persons and the world didn’t really factually start as this Genesis story states, then there was no actual fall and Augustine’s construct of original sin doesn’t exactly hold. To come to that conclusion and stop there would miss the genuine point of the story. Just as we can map the human genome and determine the complex interactions with environment and role of struggle and selection in

producing the current status of our species, so, too, we can map our moral genome and see the cumulative and mounting effects of our poor choices, our cheating and our deceit, our wars and our violence, our preening and our inflated egos. We are born into a mess that we have made over the centuries by deciding and continuing to decide that we alone are the ones who get to choose what is in our own best interest. It is a mess that we add to and we give as a wretched legacy to our children.

It cannot be an endless line of misery, we need to break it. We need to fully realize what we do when we come together as a community to witness a Baptism, particularly when we are asked to assist new parents in raising their children in the faith. At those times, we stand with God's grace in defiance of the dark, in opposition to the great weight of mounting sin, against the seduction of a numbing culture, to claim that child as our own so that child can live in the light of the faith that sustains us.

And before we leave the lessons of Eden, let's also appreciate that what happened in the Garden didn't surprise, disappoint or upset God who then had to come up with Plan B. God knew and knows what it means to honor human decisions. We know that paradoxically good judgment can come from the experience of bad decisions, that healing can come from hurt, and wholeness from profound and utter brokenness. We should see God in all these events because we are loved by a God who saves. We have a God who in all Blessedness stands outside and at the end of human history embracing it all: a God who understands us, a God who will wait patiently for us, and a God who will ultimately love us into communion.

As we enter this long vigil keeping holy the memory of the Lord's salvation, let's get down on our knees tonight and thank this God for being One Who Saves: a God who saves us most especially from ourselves.

Scrolls 'R Us

The Patriarchs – St. V Teens. Reflections by Christina Betta

In the teens' dramatization, someone brings the Book of Genesis to an ancient "publishing house." Initially impressed because "religious works are always big sellers," the publisher eventually rejects the manuscript. The author is obviously "not a

religious man,” for this God “doesn’t have a sense of how a real God behaves.” This God appears in order to comfort a slave—and an Egyptian female slave at that, interrupts the only blood sacrifice in the book, takes the “petty” domestic concerns of women seriously, and favors a man who forgives the brothers who sold him!

Tonight we have heard many stories of the patriarchs of the Old Testament. But we have also witnessed the amazing love of God. And while the scroll publisher sees this as a sign of weakness, more deeply it can be a sign of strength and a challenge to the existing culture of the time. While many people still hold to the teaching of “an eye for an eye” God begins to set an example here of a new kind of teaching, a new kind of love that knows no boundaries.

God shows his care for even the most ordinary of people and more importantly sinners. I heard at a retreat an email that really caught my attention. It said:

The next time you feel that God can’t use you, just remember:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ❖ Noah was a drunk | ❖ Elijah was suicidal |
| ❖ Abraham was too old | ❖ Jonah ran from God |
| ❖ Isaac was a daydreamer | ❖ Naomi was a widow |
| ❖ Jacob was a liar | ❖ Job went bankrupt |
| ❖ Leah was ugly | ❖ John the Baptist ate bugs |
| ❖ Joseph was abused | ❖ Peter denied Christ |
| ❖ Moses had a stuttering problem | ❖ The Disciples fell asleep while praying |
| ❖ Gideon was afraid | ❖ Martha worried about everything |
| ❖ Samson had long hair and was a womanizer | ❖ The Samaritan woman was divorced five times |
| ❖ Rahab was a prostitute | ❖ Zaccheus was too small |
| ❖ Jeremiah and Timothy were too young | ❖ Paul was too religious |
| ❖ David had an affair and was a murderer | ❖ Timothy had an ulcer and |
| | ❖ Lazarus was dead |

No more excuses now. God can use you to your full potential. Besides you aren’t the message, you are just the messenger. If you even go further, you can find plenty of saints who were maybe the biggest sinners of their time yet God found a way to use them.

Saint Francis of Assisi said: “If God can work through me, he can work through anyone.” God doesn’t expect perfection from us, just as God didn’t expect perfection from the patriarchs.

Just as God gives us love, God wants our love in return. Just as Jesus asked Peter, all these stories ask, “Do you love me?”

Hagar, do you love me enough to return to Sarah?

Abraham, do you love me enough to sacrifice your only son?

Leah, do you love me enough to let go of Jacob?
 Rachel, do you love me enough to give up your envy of Leah?
 Joseph, do you love me enough to forgive your brothers who sold you
 into slavery?

These were not easy choices for these people, and we receive the same hard questions in our own lives. But when asked whether he loved us enough, Jesus suffered and died on a cross, giving his life, pouring himself out so that we could have life anew.

God isn't asking us to shed our blood but to challenge ourselves to love more fully and without restraints. If we can do that even for a moment, deny ourselves of the hatred that plagues this world, we can truly show the light of God to others.

Another amazing thing to remember about this love is not just that it is boundless or extended to sinners, but that it has lasted so long. From the beginning of the world to now at this moment that love is just as powerful as ever. And the same love that gave Abraham a son, that forgave the Israelites over and over again as they sinned, and even led God to give his own Son as a sacrifice on the cross, is present now. No matter how far we may wander or fall into sin, God never gives up on us. While others may enter and leave our life, God stands with us until the end. And nothing, not sin, not evil, not even death can destroy such boundless love.

The Major Prophets: Jeremiah

Mike Kelly

First Reading: Jeremiah 5:9-31; 13:15-17, 22-27

Second Reading: Jeremiah 20: 7-12. 14-18

Jeremiah — passionate, intense, indignant, angry, bitter, fearless, backward looking, driven by God, a scourge of the existing political order, an outcast, an enemy, a man full of words not just inappropriate but positively offensive.

I, of course, refer to the Reverend Wright of recent fame, who seems to me the best way for an American of our time to access, because he

embodies, much of the spirit of his biblical namesake — at least judged by the severely edited snippets incessantly replayed on cable TV the last week or so. If Senator Obama gains the nomination of the Democratic party, his Jeremiah-like pastor's unpatriotic and downright venomous utterances are likely to sink his chances to become President because there is one thing we can count on: we will see the Reverend

Jeremiah Wright's fury and rage incessantly on the airwaves--courtesy of well-funded independent political groups who will make sure that working class Catholics, who like me, are not experienced Bible readers, are repulsed by a pastor spewing attacks against this country modeled on the Prophet Jeremiah. Both Jeremiahs teach the word of God by generating outrage designed to upset people into thinking about personal and political reformation. Alas, a youtube version of 30 seconds of distilled vituperation is unlikely to stimulate much thinking. Like the biblical Jeremiah in his day, outrage mostly just begets counter-outrage.

What is a prophet? Literally, it is "one who has been called"--called by God, and there are countless examples in Jeremiah of God literally calling Jeremiah to be his spokesperson, so prophets are people with a message from God. Prophets are of course people who predict the future, one of Jeremiah's great strengths. Prophets are rebels against the existing order, a special category of reformer. Prophets are religious teachers, special spiritual persons.

Jeremiah was a failure politically during his unhappy choice of an era in which to live. These were the times of the degeneration and decline of the kingdom of Israel after the glories of Kings David and Solomon, a time of weak kings, powerful

external enemies who really controlled the region, and infatuation with other gods than Yahweh. All his warnings—God's warnings--to the Jews about the impending doom awaiting them proved true as he excoriated them about straying from obeisance to the true God, demanded that they mend their ways and insisted that they choose carefully the enemies who would be least likely to engage in genocide of the Jewish people. He probably lost his life as his community decamped—against his most vehement opposition—to Egypt thinking that they could find shelter against the Babylonian domination of the region of Judah and Israel. They bet on the wrong superpower. The Egyptians slaughtered the last remnant of Judah, probably including Jeremiah, before the Jews were able to return to Israel from their exile and captivity in Babylon after a Persian king defeated the Babylonians who lost their power in the region.

I have to say, as a first time reader of Jeremiah, that what he left us is a pretty much a relentless rant, appropriately named in English a jeremiad, a series of countless warnings from a vindictive God that he will punish the Jews by turning their civilization into a desert. Included are a few stories and accounts much like the books of Kings woven into this collection of prophecies. Jeremiah is not an easy

read, but there is a certain unyielding magnificence in Jeremiah's seething. Much of it is poetry, and all of it is an expression of God's judgment on people in power, the wealthy, the arrogant, that was captured well in the first reading. While there are a few glimmers of hope relating to the time when the Jewish people will be able to return from exile to reclaim their devastated land, it is hard to read into Jeremiah anything of the future Messiah or intimations of the Christian era which makes Isaiah so attractive to Christian readers.

I want to suggest two noteworthy aspects of Jeremiah — I'll call one, a weak reading, and the second, a strong reading.

Let me start with the weak reading. He was the only prophet who expressed the personal anguish of his role in life, the ruin inherent in his service as a prophet, his doubts about God. There are a few stories woven into the patchwork of prophecies that make up the book of Jeremiah that touch on the pressures he was under. In one case he was put into an old mostly dried-up well on the assumption he would wither away and die in the mud at the bottom. But sympathetic friends rescued him. God seems almost relentlessly angry at the Jewish people in this book, and Jeremiah was burdened with the task of articulating God's

disgust and God's vision of an Israel laid waste for its transgressions.

In some respects Jeremiah seems to be almost modern. At the same time I was reading Jeremiah, I ran across a review of a translation of Charles Baudelaire's masterpiece, *Flowers of Evil*, *Les Fleurs du Mal*.¹ I don't mean to suggest for a minute that Baudelaire was even remotely a religious poet — quite the contrary. But Baudelaire is regarded as perhaps the first great modernist poet, an enormously influential figure not only in French but also in English poetry for the last century and half. What was striking to me was that Jeremiah could be described in much the same terms as Baudelaire has been described: a writer who at the same time as he faced his own culture and society frontally and critically, also articulated deeply personal insights into his own largely unhappy life. His resort to poetry was like an act of melancholic rage — his metaphors so strong that they make others seem like garden ornaments, his breaches of decorum, his deep instability, his craving for sensation reporting on the dirty secrets of life, his mode of fury as a basic way he expressed himself. His own self-description: "I have cultivated hysteria with enjoyment and terror."

¹ Lorin Stein, "Beauty's Law" [a review of Keith Waldrop's translation of Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil*] *The New Republic*, March 12, 2008, 50-55.

I think of Jeremiah's amazing metaphor of the intimacy of God's relationship with the Jewish people as a loin cloth on the body politic which is now soiled and unwearable. How many Old Testament prophets would dare to say, as in the first reading, speaking as from God, "it is for the greatness of your iniquity that your skirts are lifted up and you are violated" – language that I suspect has been significantly sanitized by the translators.

Rage is all the rage in so much of modern literature, theater, cinema, art and criticism. The world is now full of false and pseudo Jeremiahs seeking to unnerve us, goad us, shock us into paying attention, offending us as a way of teaching us or convincing us. Like the prophet himself, it is overload, hard to stomach, makes for bad dreams.

My second, or strong reading of Jeremiah begins with the series of prophecies collected at the end of the book of Jeremiah that move well beyond flaying a failing Jewish society and political leadership. It takes aim at the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the people of Moab, the Philistines, Ammonites, the Edomites, the Syrians, the kingdom of Elam, and the Assyrians. The message here seems to me unmistakable that God is in judgment of all societies and that corruption is endemic to rulers of all kinds and to all societies and cul-

tures, not just the Jews. The theologian who has made the most of this is Reinhard Niebuhr, a Protestant of enormous prominence in American intellectual life from the 1930's through the 1950's who is often cited today as someone whose insights continue to have validity for the current situation of the United States. For Niebuhr, the great lesson of a prophet like Jeremiah is two-fold:

1. "No [nation or] group (or individual), however apparently righteous or idealistic is free of anxiety and the self-concern that can breed inordinate pride and lead to the [idolatry of] centering the world around the self or group [or nation]."²
2. Israel, the Chosen Nation, as well as its enemies, is brought under divine judgment, disclosing God's transcendence and the reality of revelation into history from beyond history.³ God calls us to act on God's judgment relating to social action for justice even though we must all recognize that our faith and idealism is accompanied by deep forces of self-interest.

So, for Niebuhr, "The final enigma of history [that we can read from Jeremiah] is therefore not how the righteous will gain victory over the

²Langdon Gilkey, *On Niebuhr, A Theological Study*, (2001) 112. Bracketed material are my additions.

³ *Ibid.*, 145

unrighteous, but how the evil in every good and the unrighteousness in the righteous is to be overcome.”⁴ The solution to this enigma, argues Niebuhr, is the divine love of God accessed by Christians through faith, hope and love – a Messiah who embodies both divine mercy and divine suffering that bears and overcomes our sin. Christ is not a triumphant Messiah but God, whose loving powerlessness and vulnerability on the cross enables us to overcome our inherent sinfulness.

So, by the lights of the Prophet Jeremiah, the Resurrection to which we look forward in this vigil is not some kind of glorious triumph over history. The hard work remains of acknowledging our weaknesses and recognizing the assorted false idols

of our culture that need constant effort to overcome. Because every individual and every community, “whatever the nobility of its [or his or her] ideas [and intentions], is pushed into action by the sharp gnawings of self-interest.”⁵ Heaven knows that the history of humankind since Christ has not been a joy ride and, as Niebuhr insists, history as a story of progress or relentless improvement of the fundamental condition of humankind is a myth. Rather, the Resurrection is real, not as an exercise of power and might, but something more like a sign from God, a profound revelation acknowledging the consummation of God’s redemptive love for us through Christ.

⁴ Ibid., 177 quoting Niebuhr’s *THE NATURE AND DESTINY OF MAN*, II, 43.

⁵Ibid. 12

The Book of Job

Job 38 – Brian Loughlin

I heard it said once that a priest gave what may be the shortest homily on record. His homily was:

There is a God . . . and . . . it is not you!

Chapter 38 of Job is somewhat like that homily! Job has endured tremendous hardship. Job feels he is innocent and he also feels that God has unjustly brought down all this suffering upon him. Job has come to the realization that “Life is not fair.” Job wants to bring his case before God. Job’s been “blameless and upright,” why should the innocent have to suffer? Job demands to talk to God.

God addresses Job out of a whirlwind. (Thunder, lighting, wind—all represent the presence of God.) “Who is this that obscures divine plans with words of ignorance?” Whoa. . . . The 21st century translation of that is “You ignorant so-in-so, who do you think you are? Where were you when I put creation in motion . . . ?” Job was put in his place. Job is vividly reminded that he is dealing with the Creator of the Universe!

But God does not just brush Job off. Later in the Book of Job, God says “Would you condemn me that you may be justified? (Job 40:8b) Modern translation – Are you trying to blame the world’s problems on me? God previously described the beauty and majesty of creation. Are we now trying to blame things like global warming and wars on God?

At the end of the book, Job admits (Job 42:3-5) –

“I have dealt with great things that I do not understand; things too wonderful for me which I cannot know. I had heard of you by word of mouth, but **now my eye has seen you.**”

These last few verses, in my mind, provide a message—

- Human kind is not as smart as we think we are. We think we are smart in the 21st century! But people in the 6th century BCE and people in the 15th century CE also thought they were smart. I wonder if people in the 25th century will think we were so smart.
- Maybe what we need to learn is not more scientific facts. But maybe we need to **see God better** with our eyes and thereby better understand our human condition.
- Maybe by being more Christ-like we can correct some of the injustices in this world. Maybe we can feed the hungry, cure the sick, and care for homeless, widows, and orphans.

Maybe Job’s blessing is a better understanding of God. This understanding brings a better relationship with God. Maybe we are God’s hands and feet and as such are meant to bring justice and fairness to the world.

Let me use the human body as an analogy. There may be, or at least could be, enough food in the world to feed the hungry if it had the intelligence to produce it and distribute it to where it is needed. In the human body, food enters our mouth and the nutrients are distributed to where it is needed. Maybe

the human community needs to live like the Mystical Body of Christ, sharing needed resources among all its members.

This Summer in St V's continuing study of the Old Testament, we will be covering the Wisdom Books of Job, Proverbs, and Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes). This will be an opportunity for us to read the Book of Job and for us to wrestle with the dilemmas that Job wrestled with. Whose fault is it that life is not fair?

God's or ours?

*The Book of Esther:
From a Scared Dude(tte) to a Leading Lady*

Gerry Fialkowski

“And who knows but that you have come to the royal position for such a time as this.” This was Mordechai's response to Queen Esther. He was her uncle and guardian. She was the queen of Persia. Esther informed Mordechai that she could not approach the king to seek mercy for her people. After all, the king would have needed to summon her to appear before him. To approach him without permission could mean exile or punishment, in any case, she would experience the king's wrath. Mordechai warns Esther that her silence will not save her. *“Who knows but that you have come to the royal position for such a time as this.”*

We find that Esther represents a woman that illustrates many of the qualities of the spiritual gift of

WISDOM. To be wise is not to deny that one feels fear. Esther felt fear. The wise person **faces her fear** and acts appropriately. She was a scared dude, but not a coward. The wisdom figure understands that his or her time is **NOW**. *“And who knows but that you have come to the royal position for such a time as this.”*

The position of the queen was very important in the kingdom. She managed servants and advisors. The queen often represented the king at official functions. Sometimes, though not always, she was able to influence the king's decisions. Esther's story and her reign are not so much about her official capacities as queen, but about the role she could and would assume in the attempts to save her people. To do this, she needed to

know her people's story and tell it to the king. Esther needed to identify herself as a Jew. She sought clarity as to what could be done for the Jews and what their needs were.

Wisdom requires:

Knowledge of self

Knowing your own story and that of your people

The identification of needs

Wisdom requires:

Timing, synchronous with God's timing

(Which does not seem possible, I don't think, without **quiet time and prayer**. Esther took her quiet time, she fasted and prayed.) This is a Gethsemane experience.

It is then that we might ponder, *"Who knows but we have come to this place and time for a specific reason or reasons?"*

Esther's life changed when she remembered her story and she rose to the occasion. After fasting and praying, she summoned the courage to fight for what was right. She gained clarity. She was a Jew, living incognito. Her story was connected to that of all Jews living in exile. It has been said that God's story is our story. The wise queen went back to her sources and realized silence would no longer work for her. She moves from passivity to activity.

Being at the right place at the right time doesn't mean that we even planned to be at this particular place or time in history. It is contingent upon a lot of things beyond our control. So, Esther is the chosen queen at a time in Persia's history when as a Jewess, she can do something significant.

After listening to the wisdom of those who came before her, she discerned that the time was right. It was God's timing not hers. She tells the king the truth and takes a stand.

Esther reminds me of another young Jew, in a later time. He did what he did with God's timing. He was at the right place at the right time. Of course, it didn't always feel that way to Him; of course He felt afraid at times. He too worked to discover who He was and who His people were. He identified what their needs were. He prayed and fasted; he gained clarity. He told God's story too. *"When you pray, say Abba, Father."* He was active in the story of His people.

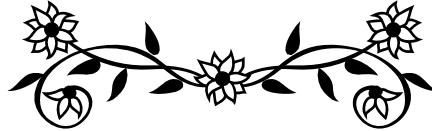
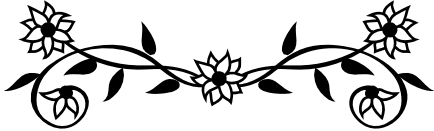
Being wise isn't easy. The young queen from Persia and the young preacher from Galilee, a scared dude and dude-ette, worked with God to save God's people. Like Esther and Jesus, we who seek to be wise need to wonder, *"Who can know but that we are not here, now, at the right place and the right time?"* Thus we pray, seek

clarity, identify needs, tell God's story, BE GOD'S STORY.

Certainly what Esther did is not the same as Jesus' emptying Himself for the forgiveness of sins. Still, thanks to Esther, Purim

became a great celebration for the Jews. She did help to save her people and **wisdom is as wisdom does.**

(Play Purim music, Dance!)



Snapshots

from the Men's Clothing Program

On the second Thursday of every month, the Men's Clothing Program provides help to men in the area. Distribution starts at 1:00 p.m. and men start lining up as early as 7:00.

"The poor are the hope of mankind . . . for in them we see the hungry Christ looking up at us. Will we refuse him?" Mother Teresa

"Uh-oh, this one could be a problem," I thought as I looked at my newest customer. The routine in the Men's Program calls us to work one-an-one with each man, helping them find their sizes in the clothing items they need. Most are of average size. But this man's bulk matched that of a football player.

"I'm going to stay with my family in Virginia for a while," he told me, "and I'd like a nice jacket for the trip." Unselfish, he wanted only what he needed, and I began looking for a jacket his size. Within a few minutes, I was able to find one that had been donated. When my customer tried it on, the length was right and the sleeves came just below his wrists. A perfect fit! With gratitude, he turned to me with a huge smile on his face and exclaimed, "God is good, God is so good!"

Our son has special needs, so the time we spend volunteering at St. Vincent's means a great deal to us. But we've learned that the giving is really a two-way street. Here's one example: it was the end of the day and supplies were just about gone when a young man came to the door needing size fourteen work boots. Fortunately we had a pair tucked away and we brought them to him. When he saw them, he looked at us and cried tears of gratitude.

James had a gentle and arresting face, a Jesus face I call it. He said he needed everything and I believed him; his body odor was apparent and his clothes were ragged and dirty. His fatigue was apparent and he asked me to help him pick out clothes since he couldn't see too well. His glasses had been broken. Hearing this I suggested Health Care for the Homeless, but he said he couldn't do that

His despondency visible, I helped him select everything and he made no special requests, only murmuring a thank you with each item. However as we gathered these new items, I became increasingly concerned about him. Finally I asked, "What has happened, James?"

Slowly and thoughtfully, he answered, "It's too long a story. I made some good choices, and then I made bad choices. It's just too late." Instinctively, I felt he needed comforting more than a pep talk. So I simply held his hand as we said good-bye. And when I did, he said, "I will remember you."

The above are but three stories from the Men's Clothing Program, held here at St. Vincent's on the second Thursday of each month (September through June).

Some of our customers are just out of prison and in need of extra clothing. Others are on their way to rehab and want to arrive wearing something decent. There are those who need dry clothes, because theirs was saturated as they slept in the rain the night before. Some need boots in order to work on construction jobs. Then there are men who need to replace items that were stolen.

At the Men's Clothing Program, volunteers fill these needs as best as possible in a welcoming, caring atmosphere. Our work is satisfying and our rewards numerous:

"We appreciate all you do for us."
"You'll be here next month, right?"
"God bless you."
"Thank you."
"Praise God."

“Pray for me.”

What Are We Doing at Mass?

Anne Maura English

So, we have celebrated the Liturgy of the Word, we have brought forward bread and wine—and with them, ourselves—as gift, and we have proclaimed, “Holy, holy, holy . . . It is right to give God thanks and praise.”

And with that we enter the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the Eucharistic Prayer. In the next few sections of this series we’re going to look at that more closely. For many Catholics, it seems to be the time when minds are most likely to drift. For some, it seems like a long-winded way to “get” to communion. But this prayer is much more than a way to get us to the reception of communion.

The Eucharistic Prayer has its roots in the Jewish blessing at the breaking of the bread, which took place at the beginning of the meal. The earliest Christians still celebrated the “breaking of the bread” with a regular meal, so using a table meal blessing came naturally. The opening paragraphs of the Eucharistic Prayer and the account of Jesus’ institution of the Eucharist continue that tradition of calling to mind the goodness of God. In the current prayers, they flow directly from the sentiments of the Preface Prayer we have just prayed.

Yes, it is right to give God thanks and praise.

Why? because (Eucharistic Prayer II) “You are holy indeed, the fountain of all holiness.”
Why? because (Eucharistic Prayer III) “You are holy indeed and all creation rightly gives you praise. All life, all holiness comes from You through Your Son, Jesus Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit.”

If we are trying to see the Eucharist as a ritual that brings our whole life into focus, these words are worth pondering. What we are saying here is that all of the goodness, the “wholeness” around us or within us that has been part of our lives or will be part of our lives in the coming week, all the good we have accomplished this past week or will accomplish in the coming week, all this is sourced in God. There is no other place good comes from. Wherever we find it, wherever we live it, we touch God’s life, we share in God’s life. And so this prayer transcends a table prayer, transcends a prayer for this Sunday event. Prayed in this wider context it is a “eucharistia,” a thanksgiving prayer to God for all that graces our lives. We may not be aware of that intimate, perpetual presence of a loving God in our lives; we may not attend to it as our week unfolds. But here at this table, now in this moment, we acknowledge its reality and give thanks.

In so doing, we acknowledge that our ordinary lives in which that life and wholeness happen are part of the entire history of salvation, of God's dealing with humankind. The formal language, the ritual setting remind us that we stand in a tradition that stretches thousands of years back—to Jesus and the first Christians, yes, but beyond that to countless generations of the Chosen People. In our daily lives, the acts of God which we recounted in our biblical readings minutes ago continue. In us—as we go to work or school, take care of our families, fall in love, bond with our friends, participate in our communities, struggle with problems, take a break—in us, the story of salvation history continues to unfold. Our lives are the stuff of scripture because the same God is present to us and active in our lives. “It is right to give God thanks and praise.”

“All life, all holiness comes from You.” And do you want to see what that life and holiness are like? Do you want to know how important it is to God that we know we are offered life, and “life in abundance.” Then listen to this. “On the night before he died” The recounting of the story of Jesus' institution of the Eucharist should not be a break in the Eucharistic prayer, when we start paying attention for a few minutes. It flows from what we have just said about God. Having turned our attention to God's goodness and outreach to us, we bring the story to its apex: the forging of a new *covenant*. “On Calvary and Easter Sunday I will proclaim this covenant in my blood. I am your God always—sworn to you in love and fidelity, pledging you Resurrection life here and, in its fullness, in eternity. Here at this table I give you a perpetual sign. I am with you always. I share my life with you—always.” The gift of the living body of Christ as bread and wine provides a dramatic witness to how anxious God is to have us participate in God's life, God's holiness.

And this also is sacrament of our daily lives. It is inevitable, I suppose, that bread and wine would become ritualized into something “special.” It was not so in the beginning. In the early church, when a child looked at that eucharistic bread and wine she saw the exact same thing her mother put on the table every night for supper. There is a value to remembering that. I don't think it is too presumptuous to suggest that Jesus specifically chose common elements of everyday life so that some of their sacramental import would “rub off” on our everyday life. Jesus' presence in the eucharistic bread and wine is a privileged presence—but one that calls us to recognize his presence in the common elements of our own lives.

(Those of you who've had a course in, or read a book on, the liturgy may be saying, “You skipped the epiclesis. How could you do that; that's key.” It wasn't an oversight. We need to give that the time and attention it deserves, so we'll pick that up in the next section.)

Editor's Note: Parish Council Minutes are posted on the St. V website and are sent out on the parish e-mail tree shortly after each meeting—which is held on the 2nd Tuesday of the month. They are reprinted here for those who do not have access to internet or prefer a hard copy. Formatting has been added for reading ease and is not part of the original minutes.)

Parish Council Minutes

February 19, 2008. *(rescheduled from Feb. 12 due to inclement weather).* The Parish Council of St. Vincent de Paul Church met on Tuesday, February 19, 2008. Next meeting will be Tuesday, March 11, 2008. The meeting was brought to order at 7:35 pm by Colleen McCahill. In attendance: Fr. Dick Lawrence, Pat Ball, Joan Campbell, Peggy Meyer, Colleen McCahill, Chris Kreeger, Barbara Murphy, Bill Pearson, Dennis Moore, Graham Yearley, Kathy Brown, and Dennis Flynn.

New Business

Habitat for Humanity: Jayna Powell from Chesapeake Habitat for Humanity spoke to the Council about this year's project with United Churches. She distributed information regarding Habitat for Humanity and this year's new construction build in Pigtown/Washington Village. She thanked the parish for its involvement and gave ideas about fundraising as well as recruitment of volunteers and donations.

Old Business

Financial Report: Dennis Flynn delivered the parish financial report. Parish Council reviewed the income statement through the end of January and most expenses were on budget. Offertories were over budget as well as poor box benefit income. There is a new poor box for emergency services. Utilities continue to be higher than usual and church maintenance is lower than budgeted. No surprises this month.

Parish Council: Bishop Madden, Baltimore's urban vicar, will visit St. Vincent's next week and will meet with various committees. Parish Council completed a survey in preparation for this

visit and will meet with the Bishop on Tuesday, February 20.

Park/Response to Town Meeting:

The town meeting in January demonstrated that there are still many strong feelings on both sides of the issue. It was clear that several people feel that some action should be taken immediately. Dick has said he cannot, in good conscience, ask the police to clear the park. There was discussion about the pace that the parish council has been taking regarding this issue, noting that patience of many parishioners has run out. Council feels strongly that we need to allow the partnership with the city to move forward as well as work on the Weinberg grant for funding.

There were several letters written by parishioners with concerns about the park. Colleen has reached out to some of the folks and talked to them personally. Audrey Rogers responded by email to one of the writers with specific points. Colleen will write letters of response to those who wrote to the Council regarding the park. An ad hoc committee has formed including Dick, Colleen, Audrey, and Deacon Bill. They have been meeting with the city representatives regarding a memorandum of understanding and the next steps in addressing the problems in the park. This

ad hoc group will operate independently but will consult with the parish council for any large decisions. Council approved the Park ad hoc committee.

Concerning the structures currently in the park, Dick intends to ask the city for help in dismantling the structures after the first of spring. Last year Dick and Officer Talley enforced the “no tent” rule which the residents did respect.

Deacon Bill will communicate news about the park on a weekly basis through the bulletin. The purpose of this is to share the victories and challenges that are happening with the park and clear up misunderstandings.

Council discussed the problem of well-intended people dropping off donations and the mess that is often left. Deacon Bill has made an effort to thank the donors but to ask them to bring trash bags to clean up. He also has asked them to coordinate donations through him to avoid duplication of services. There was a suggestion about removing some of the shrubs where the rats live.

Colleen distributed a nine month timeline regarding progress to date on the park as well as future tasks for the parish. She asked the council to read and review the timeline for the next meeting.

Committee Reports

Peace and Justice: The Living Stations of the Cross sponsored by Pax Christi will take place on Good Friday beginning at City Hall at noon. The committee recently distributed information regarding lobbying state delegates against the death penalty. The next meeting will be Feb. 29 at the home of Peggy Meyer.

Liturgy: Our next meeting is this Saturday, March 8 and we will ensure that Holy Week is covered, plan for the May events and the Summer Scripture series, and finalize the parish liturgy survey scheduled for the end of April. The committee is working with the music director to find the best way to display the words for hymns during liturgies. Several approaches have been tried and adjustments are being made.

Pastoral Care: Approximately 25-30 people attended training for volunteers. Diocesan volunteer forms were completed and manuals were distributed. After all volunteers have been approved they will begin taking referrals.

Meeting adjourned with the Lord's Prayer at 9:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Barbara Murphy

Parish Council Minutes

March 11, 2008. The Parish Council of St. Vincent de Paul Church met on Tuesday, March 11, 2008. Next meeting will be Tuesday, April 8, 2008. The meeting was brought to order at 7:35 pm by Colleen McCahill. Kathy Brown offered a prayer. In attendance: Fr. Dick Lawrence, Audrey Rogers, Ray Heil, Joan Campbell, Nancy O'Neill, Colleen McCahill, Molly Hyatt, Chris Kreeger, Barbara Murphy, Lornā Patterson, Jerome Bird, Kathy Brown, Barbara Hodnett, Larry Fenaroli, and Dennis Flynn.

Pastor's Report

Lent is in full swing

Financial Report: Dennis Flynn delivered the parish financial report. Parish Council reviewed the income statement through the end of February and most expenses were on budget. Offertories were over budget again this month. The insurance company has agreed to pay for \$160,000 of the tower renovation. Combined with other income, the parish is still short about \$25,000. However, Dick has spoken to a regular benefactor, part of whose annual donation will pay for that shortfall.

Review of Pastoral Visit: Bishop Madden visited at the end of February. He was very pleased overall and pleased with our plan for succession. He and his staff discussed some small issues regarding the finance committee as well as financial record keeping. They suggested instituting a stewardship campaign or putting information on the website about development and making donations. Bishop Madden and his staff also strongly promoted the Cardinal's Lenten Appeal. They were also not in favor of the Historic Trust Fund.

Dick had a lengthy discussion with Bishop Madden regarding our parish council constitution. Regarding the succession, the Bishop and his staff discussed looking at alternative models such as sharing a pastor

rather than only the pastoral life director model.

They were more concerned about the financial status of the parish than succession. They suggested taking a look at other parishes for ideas related to outreach and also having each parishioner to invite friends to come. The council discussed the issue of outreach further and will return to it. Kathy Brown suggested getting information in writing regarding the concerns and suggestions that came out of the meetings with Bishop Madden and his staff.

Park Working Group (PWG): Audrey Rogers distributed an operational plan, a timeline, and a proposal for funding. She discussed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the city which provides a partnership between the parish and the city. Officer Talley will assist the PWG to enforce the "no structure" policy on April 15th. To address park orderliness, the police have been contacted to conduct more drive-bys to monitor the park. The PWG intends to attempt to control donations beginning in April.

Audrey has spoken to a representative from Baltimore Downtown Partnership to possibly get some training donated for the folks in the park in creating a cleaning corps. The Weinberg Foundation was not open to a proposal to fund a project. However, Audrey has been in contact with the Abell Foundation. That proposal is due May 1st and Audrey will complete this.

There is another possibility of applying to the Campaign for Human Development. Audrey delineated the objectives and strategies for creating the park assembly, the target amount that should be raised, and the uses for the funds. The parish will be notified about the fund after Easter.

Most importantly, Audrey is proposing doing a parish campaign to raise funds by doing a quarterly special collection. Dick reminded the council that he does not generally approve of fundraising. He prefers to put up some initial funds for basic program costs and then have an outside donor fund the rest of the project including a part-time park manager. Council discussed the issue of funding, particularly funding the park manager position. Audrey reiterated the fact that the wish of the majority of parishioners is that something be done soon. Larry suggested tapping into Our Daily Bread for a liaison if possible.

In light of how long this project will take, Chris Kreeger suggested setting up a park foundation to which the parish and parishioners as well as community members could contribute. The foundation would pay for park projects. Some council members felt this was too complicated while others liked this idea.

After some discussion, there was a suggestion that the parish council approve \$2,500 for start up money and then an announcement be placed in the bulletin inviting those who are interested in making donations specifically for the park project. The Council approved this plan and Audrey will submit information to the bulletin so that parishioners understand what this \$2500 is paying for.

Architecture Brochure: Jerome has made a rack card that will be placed at various visitors centers around the city. It lists some historic information about the parish as well as hours and location. Jerome also printed a detailed brochure that provides historical information as well as architectural features and timeline of restorations. The brochures will be available in the back of church. He is proposing to make 5000 copies for \$4400. Council approved this expense.

Committee Reports

Education Committee: The retreat director for this year is Fr. David Knight. The retreat will be entitled "What Would St. Paul Say?" There is a new location outside of Gettysburg and the meals will be prepared and clean-up is provided. Two lodges being rented and camping is permitted. The committee thinks that it will be cheaper this year. The committee noted that last year's retreat was the smallest ever with very few children. The committee continues to examine the problem of attracting young families. This year there was not a weekly discussion series but rather there were monthly lectures/discussions that were well attended. The committee also did not do a Lenten discussion series. The committee is open to suggestions for next year.

Liturgy: Our next meeting is this Saturday, March 8., and we will ensure Holy Week is covered, plan for the May events and the Summer Scripture series, and finalize the parish liturgy survey scheduled for the end of April. The committee is working with the music director on the best way to display words for hymns dur-

ing liturgies. Several approaches have been tried and adjustments are being made.

May liturgy dates: First Communion May 4, Seniors May 11 (Pentecost), and Mass of Healing May 18 (Trinity Sunday—readings will be changed).

The books for the Summer Series for the next three years have been chosen: Proverbs, Job, and Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes). Brian Loughlin becomes committee chair in May. Peggy Meyer has volunteered to

co-chair and should be confirmed by the committee at the May meeting.

Social Action: The Committee is considering planning some social action liturgies for this year to expose the whole parish to concepts of social justice.

Meeting adjourned with the Lord's Prayer at 9:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Barbara Murphy

Parish Council Minutes

April 8, 2008. The Parish Council of St. Vincent de Paul Church met on Tuesday, April 8, 2008. Next meeting will be Tuesday, May 13, 2008. The meeting was brought to order at 7:35 pm by Colleen McCahill. Colleen offered a prayer. In attendance: Fr. Dick Lawrence, Audrey Rogers, Pat Ball, Joan Campbell, Nancy O'Neill, Colleen McCahill, Graham Yearley, Molly Hyatt, Barbara Murphy, Kathy Brown, Dennis Brown, and Dennis Flynn.

Pastor's Report

Easter services went well. There were many people working and planning to make it come together.

Sick Parishioners: Ken Berger is still not doing well and has been in and out of the hospital. Dick also visited Mr. Kane who is getting infirm but his mind is still sharp. He is not able to get around without help. He is happy to get cards. Theresa Wolf continues to need prayers as doctors have found an aneurism and are placing a stent.

Parish News: Judith Sheagren has resigned and a process is being implemented to hire a new cantor.

Neighborhood News: A new emergency shelter has opened nearby on Fayette Street across from the Post Office with 270 beds. It will be open for 90 days. Police presence has increased as a result. Dick worries that this will negatively affect

the park. Sanitation department has increased rat patrol. The plan is to move the shelter near to Our Daily Bread. Healthcare for the Homeless is moving into the neighborhood as well.

Financial Report: Dennis Flynn delivered the parish financial report. Parish Council reviewed the income statement through the end of March. Sunday offertories continue to be very good and parking income is up. Utilities are high but church maintenance was a little lower. The insurance company has agreed to pay for \$160,000 of the cross restoration, which leaves a shortfall of \$25,000. Part of a large donation which came in this month will cover this shortfall. We will use as much of next year's income from the Trust Fund as necessary to supply the balance due on the tower renovation.

Town Meetings: Colleen discussed the need for better communication that was expressed by parishioners during the Listening Project. Colleen suggested turning coordination and agenda-setting over to parish members rather than only being organized by the parish council. There was some discussion about whether and how to do this. It was suggested that parishioners be asked to suggest agenda items and also parishioners could take responsibility to facilitate. Council discussed having regular times throughout the year for Town Meetings. Council also discussed ways to organize the meetings and allow everyone the chance to speak.

Park Working Group: Audrey Rogers discussed progress on the park. On March 27, the PWG met with Baltimore Homeless Services (St. V's is on schedule for the housing program to start initial evaluations in mid-late April and can expect a 60-90 day processing period before first placements). The PWG also met with Officer Talley (who visits the park 2-3 times per week) as well as Sergeant Bennett (who coordinates patrol operations and will enlist more support from Southeastern District in which St. V's park lies).

The PWG is working with the Downtown Partnership, who will assist in training a park superintendent. A job description for the 12 hour per week position has been written and will be in this week's bulletin.

PWG organized a meeting for those who had concerns, criticism, or who wanted to help. People appreciated the opportunity to ask more questions. They seemed appreciative of the work that is being done in the form of capacity building and developing relationships with city and private organizations. The Letter of Inquiry was

submitted to the Goldseker Foundation on March 27 for its April 1 deadline. Next up is the Abell application on May 1. Baseline photos have been taken which will serve as a benchmark for how the park is progressing. The parish has started accepting donations for the park projects. Bulletin announcements and monthly meetings after the 9:30 have begun.

Council talked about how the deconstruction of the structures in the park will happen. The city will be contacted to see if they can bring a dump truck to haul away any debris from the deconstruction.

Parish Council Election: Colleen and Dick made a list of the number of representatives needed for each Mass for the next election. There are three spots for the 9:30 a.m. Mass and one for the 7:15 p.m. Mass. Nominations will be the last two weekends in April. Biographies of nominees will come out on May 11th and elections will be the weekend of May 18th.

Committee Reports

Peace and Justice: The Committee attended the Commemoration of Dr. King's death at Weyland Baptist Church April 4 in place of their monthly meeting. There was a very inspiring sermon. BRIDGE will be having a "Get out the Vote" meeting on May 27, 2008, at the Cathedral of the Incarnation. The next meeting of the Committee will be May 9th at Cathy Bunting's home.

Outreach: A greeting ministry is being proposed to welcome people into the church, as well as a monthly coffee hour for new parishioners. The first coffee hour has been tentatively scheduled for the second Sunday in June. There will be three

representatives, identified with a rosette, to greet people after the 9:30 Mass. It was suggested that new parishioners be given the brochure on committees made by the Social Action Committee last fall. Also suggested was a follow-up invitation to new folks for ways in which they want to be involved.

Liturgy: There will be a liturgy survey on the acceptability of current liturgy practices. It will be given on April 19/20 and April 26/27. Audrey Rogers has completed her term as Chair and Brian Loughlin and Peggy Meyer will be Co-

Chairs next year. May liturgy dates: First Communion May 4, Seniors May 11 (Pentecost), and Mass of Healing May 18 (Trinity Sunday- readings will be changed).

Art and Architecture: The Committee suggested that there be a tower dedication when the weather is nice. The next project will be the south side windows needing to be replaced including frames. Work might be done next year when funds are available. It could be very expensive.

Meeting adjourned with the Lord's Prayer at 9:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Barbara Murph

A Spiritual Testament

I imagine that today I am to die. I ask for time to be alone and write down for my friends a sort of testament for which the points that follow could serve as chapter titles.

1. These things I have loved in life (things I tasted, looked at, smelled, heard, touched):
2. These experiences I have cherished:
3. These ideas have brought me liberation:
4. These beliefs I have outgrown:
5. These convictions I have lived by:
6. These are the things I have lived for:
7. These insights I have gained in the school of life (insights into God, the world, human nature, Jesus Christ, love, religion, prayer):
8. These risks I took, these dangers I have courted:
9. These sufferings have seasoned me:
10. These lessons life has taught me:
11. These influences have shaped my life (persons, occupations, books, events):
12. These scripture texts have lit my path:
13. These things I regret about my life:
14. These are my life's achievements:
15. These persons are enshrined within my heart:
16. These are my unfulfilled desires:

I choose an ending for this document: a poem—my own or someone else's; a prayer; a sketch or picture from a magazine; a scripture text; or anything that I judge would be an apt conclusion to my testament (pp.14-15).

Anthony De Mello, S.J., *Wellsprings: A Book of Spiritual Exercises*

