

Fourth State of the Parish Address
Sunday, October 25, 2009
Monsignor John C. Marine

Since I became your pastor five years ago, I have used this last Sunday in October as an opportunity to speak at all of the Masses and give you what I call:

“A Pastor’s State of the Parish Address.”

I thank Father Bordonaro, Father Bob, Father Wilz and Deacon Mike, and all of you, for allowing me to borrow their normal opportunity to preach God’s word to you so that we can reflect together on this community of faith that is so dear to all of us called Saint Bede the Venerable Parish.

You know, the word *parish* comes from the Greek work *Parokia*, which means a “temporary shelter or resting spot on the journey”. As Christians, we know that the journey we are talking about is the journey of faith to our Father’s house in Heaven. If that is the ultimate goal of life then we can see how important our parish is to shelter and strengthen us on the journey and how essential it is then for us to continually evaluate just how effectively our parish is providing what we need as we make our way through the twists and turns of life.

To do this we must rely on the help of Jesus and His words. In today’s Gospel, the blind man approached Jesus and said:

“Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me.”

And notice Jesus’ response.

He said to the man named Bartimaeus:

“What do you want me to do for you?”

If a parish is meant to be the place where we find Jesus in our midst, nourishing us and encouraging us on the journey of life, then as a parish we need to be asking people we serve the same question Jesus said:

“What do you want me to do for you?”

At the very outset of this report, I am very pleased to say (from a pastor’s perspective) that here at Saint Bede Parish, not only is that question always being asked, but more importantly we are responding more and more effectively to the answers we receive. I am pleased that so many of our people feel that we, their priests, are approachable and available to speak to them.

Each day Father Bordonaro and I go to our message box and find numerous calls from people who need to speak to us about something they are facing either with their marriage, their children, their health or a lot of other things that challenge their faith.

So often, like Bartimaeus in today’s Gospel, people are blinded by the cares of life and cannot see God’s presence there and hopefully we can do something to lift that veil from their eyes.

But we priests are not the only ones offering service. If someone asked me what best defines Saint Bede the Venerable Parish in Holland I would say it is the willingness of the people to serve each other’s needs both those here in our parish, and beyond it as well.

In fact recently I was working on an application for a grant from a charitable foundation that might help our Capital Campaign and the foundation wanted to know

what does our parish do to reach out and serve our community? By just going through that exercise I was amazed at all we do.

Just to mention a few:

- Our parish nurse ministry responds to calls from people in our community who have social service needs and who desire referrals.
- Our prayer chain welcomes requests from people of all faiths who need the assistance of a praying community.
- Our bereavement support team helps all those who have recently experienced the loss of a loved one.
- There is a group of parishioners, who through the organization *Aid For Friends* supply cooked meals for those in need in Bucks County and beyond.
- There are also those who supply casserole dinners to Saint John's Hospice an out reach to homeless men in the city of Philadelphia.
- Our parish offers support sessions to everyone in the community who is experiencing the aftermath of divorce and separation from a spouse.
- A year ago we started a program called *One Can At A Time*, which is a weekly food drive and the donations serve Bucks County individuals in need, regardless of their faith.

I am amazed each week how the containers are overflowing with food items for as we know today food, even canned food, is expensive.

Perhaps one of the greatest examples of the way our parishioners respond to the question that Jesus would have us ask:

“What do you want me to do for you?”

is what is happening today in our church hall after every Mass.

Parishioners will be chancing off gift baskets which will support a young and needy family in our parish where the father is experiencing serious illness which has kept him out of work and caused so many unbearable expenses.

This is what Saint Bede the Venerable Parish is all about: *service*.

And how appropriate a year ago, when we were looking for a logo and a motto for our parish Capital Campaign, the Leadership Team chose this motto:

Our Living Church....Growing to Serve

That title is appropriate because the needs are always growing.

Certainly one factor that is present in the life of our parish that was not present when I gave this talk a year ago is the economic factor. We are living through a time unlike any, in recent memory, where people are losing jobs or fearful that they might lose them.

Where houses are being foreclosed and the life of many families is being disrupted. In response, here at Saint Bede's we have established a Parish Networking Club, open to anyone experiencing job transition during this difficult time.

So the pastoral needs of our parishioners are varied and constantly changing. That is why I rely on my fellow priests, especially Father Bordonaro as well as our Parish Pastoral Council. Even though I feel I know a lot about the needs of our parishioners, I would be short sighted if I thought I could know all of them and how to

address them. We have an excellent Pastoral Council some of whom you elected and some whom I appointed. They are a wonderful cross section of our parish. They are currently involved with the development of a new Parish Pastoral Plan. So many of the programs and initiatives that we enjoy now here at Saint Bede's have come from the Pastoral Plan that was written prior to my arrival here.

Such things as:

A full time director of Religious Education to oversee our CCD program.

The employment of a full time Youth Minister.

The establishment of the Parish Nurse Ministry.

But now we need to look at our present and future needs. The Pastoral Council is relying on information that was gathered just a few years ago from the Focus Groups we held with about 200 parishioners. But they are anxious to hear from you now. The Pastoral Council has committed themselves to being present at as many parish functions as possible to speak with you. But also recently we established a special part of our parish web-site with an e-mail address whereby you can offer your input and ideas directly to them.

While we are a parish that cares about each other, let us not overlook the fact that we are first and foremost a parish that loves and serves God. We do what we do for one another because we have been given the tremendous example of our Savior, Jesus Christ. I am so edified, as I am sure all our priests are, for your weekly attendance at Mass and for your insistence that your children worship with you as a family.

No doubt one of the best barometers of the strength of faith of the people of our parish was our recent Forty Hours Devotion. The 25 or 30 priests who were in attendance are still sending me notes and letters about how personally touched they were to see the tremendous crowd of people walking in the procession that night and their reverence and respect for Jesus in the Eucharist.

While the faith is strong here and we are always welcoming new families who are either moving in or attracted to the warmth of our parish, the reality is there are many who for one reason or another, do not come. It is a challenge we must face together as a parish. While the reasons are varied, one of the reasons we priests sometimes hear of why people have strayed from the Catholic Church is they feel their spiritual needs are not being met and very often what they mean is their need to be fed by God's word in the Bible.

In response to that need during the coming year we plan to begin, after Christmas, a Bible Study program called the *Great Adventure* that has been proven very effective for many parishes, especially for our neighbor Saint Andrew. When that happens, we hope that you, our active parishioners, will consider coming and reaching out to someone in your neighborhood or family who has strayed from the faith and who needs to be reconnected to Jesus Christ and the church.

As you know, the many wonderful things that happen here at Saint Bede's and those that we hope for in the future do not and will not happen without your generosity: Your generosity of time, talent and treasure. I want to commend the literally hundreds of you who offer your time and talent as catechists, coaches, scout leaders, liturgical

ministers, on and on it goes, as well as for your generous financial support of the parish. In a time and culture when people lead very busy lives and have less available income, this support is extraordinary.

As the good stewards you have to be with your own home and family, we are likewise, here at Saint Bede's, trying to use our resources carefully and eliminating expenses where possible. Nonetheless, the increase in staff salaries as well as cost increase for utilities and other services that you experience are the same financial challenges the parish faces. So now more than ever the weekly sacrifices that you continue to make and any increase in offering where possible you can make are critical to the financial stability of our parish.

As I do every year in conjunction with this State of the Parish Address, I have published in today's bulletin the financial statement with the operating income and expenses for our parish for the last fiscal year. Unfortunately for the first time in my tenure as your pastor, I have to report an operating loss. This means that we had to go into our parish savings to pay some of our bills.

You will also see that this deficit is primarily due to an increase in parish subsidy towards the running of our parish school which happened as a result of the decline in enrollment over the past five to six years. Currently the percentage rate of our parish subsidy of the school is much higher than most of the other parishes in the Archdiocese and much higher than the Archdiocese recommends, so that a parish can support all of the various aspects of its mission, including worship, adult education, youth ministry, evangelization, etc.

Many of you are owners of small businesses and you know that this is a fiscal trend that must be reversed as soon as possible.

But I am happy to report to you that we have begun a visioning process to devise a strategic plan for our school, Just this week, I appointed members to what will now be a Strategic Planning Committee or Advisory Board. Together as pastor, principal, parents, faculty and parishioners we will address the challenges of enrollment, development and curriculum so that Saint Bede the Venerable will always have an excellent, Blue Ribbon, attractive, affordable Catholic School.

I am certain that with the quality of talent we have in our parish, with the commitment of our school parents, a wonderful faculty and the assistance of a qualified Finance Council, we will achieve that goal.

Next year, 2010, Saint Bede the Venerable celebrates its 45th anniversary of establishment as a parish in this Archdiocese. We will begin a five year period of preparation for our Golden Anniversary which is always a historical moment in the life of a parish. No doubt, the defining piece of that preparation will be our efforts to renovate, beautify and make permanent this church, which is our temporary place of nourishment and refreshment on the journey to God.

I believe, and our Campaign Committee believes, that it is an amazing accomplishment, given our economy, that we have raised thus far \$2.5 million dollars in cash and pledges. This has been accomplished through an average contribution of \$5,000 and from only 500 families thus far.

The fact of the matter is, we still must raise \$2 million dollars to reach our goal which we hope to soon achieve when we reach out either by a visit or by a mailing to

the several hundred families that have not yet been contacted. You can make a difference.

Of all the parish facilities on our campus the one that is used by every parishioner is our church. Everyone in this parish has an opportunity to leave behind a legacy to our children and grandchildren.

For when this church is completed, it will not only be a place where we come to meet Jesus. It will also be a church that will teach the faith, for every marble statue, every piece of mosaic in the Baldacchino, every stained glass window, every oil painted Station of the Cross will help to teach again and again to young and old alike the wonderful message of Jesus Christ.

It will be a church that will evangelize and attract many who have left us for one reason or another to give Saint Bede's another look. For here they will experience the grandeur and beauty of God who leaves the majesty of Heaven to meet us in our loneliness, our pain and our sin to raise us to new life.

I invite you to be a part of that legacy, that history. In fact, after each Mass today, a representative of our Campaign Committee will be available to answer questions or assist you in your own participation.

In conclusion, I hope from this report that you see that Saint Bede the Venerable Parish, your parish, while we have many goals to work towards, is as vibrant and strong as ever and that can be said because more and more parishioners are taking ownership for the accomplishment of all the many parts of our mission that I spoke of in today's address.

Let me say, as your pastor, that there is no place that I would rather be in my life and in my priesthood, than here with you. You are my flock but you are also my family. And I have wonderful fellow priests to share you all with and who, like me, love you dearly.

And I hope that you are as thankful as I am to be a part of this parish. From your support, your words of encouragement to all of us priests and your participation, I know you are.

In the meantime as we go forward, let us pray that we will be always faithful to our motto and be what Jesus wants us to be, His living church, growing to serve.

May God Bless You.