

January 29, 2023 – The Gospel of the Beatitudes

The Gospel about the Beatitudes this Sunday according to Matthew is very powerful. The Beatitudes refer to paths toward authentic happiness, blessedness and being favored by God. Jesus is presented as the New Moses but also greater than Moses. He teaches his disciples about the essential, the absolute and the supreme good. He said that I have come so that your joy may be complete and that you may have fullness of life. The Beatitudes are attitudes, virtues and values of the Kingdom of heaven. They are not visible, external blessings nor worldly ones. The blessings are internal characteristics that each disciple has to develop. They are God's gifts to those who are humble, open and receptive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The first four beatitudes like, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness", describe the heart of the person who is rightly related to God. The rest of the beatitudes like, "Blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers, and the persecuted", describe how such a person relates to other people. The Beatitudes reveal the core of Christian living and that is our deep love of God and of our neighbor. We are called to rely on God alone because our world creates false gods and security. The Beatitudes lead us to a right, harmonious relationship with God, with creation, with others and with ourselves. Finally, the Beatitudes point to Jesus who is poor, humble, meek, mournful, merciful and suffering servant.

January 22, 2023 - Feast of St. Agnes, Virgin and Martyr

When Bishop Robert McElroy called me two years ago and told me that I am assigned as Pastor of St. Agnes Catholic Church, I had mixed feelings. I was shocked, surprised and excited because to be assigned as pastor of a parish is a great task and responsibility. It is also a sign of the bishop's trust in me. Moreover, I was also scared because the parish is new to me and I'm not so familiar with the life St. Agnes. After almost two years in the parish, I began to love St. Agnes because at a young age she understood her calling and purpose in life. She dedicated her whole life to Jesus. God became the center in her life putting Him above all else. What a great saint! She is an example to young people today. All of us are called to put Jesus as the absolute, essential and supreme good in our lives. She was a courageous woman. She was not afraid to die. She understood that love is greater than death and that God can bring the best from the worst, the most wonderful from the unexpected places. She centered her life on the Cross of Jesus because the Cross is the key in knowing and loving God. Jesus is everything to her. The image of a lamb beside her signifies that her life is a precious offering to God, a sacrifice for the salvation of souls. When somebody wanted to dishonor her, that person became blind and she healed him by her prayer. What a selfless person! Jesus is the greatest gift of the Father to us. He is the fulfillment of all God's promises and rewards. He fulfills the yearning and longing of the people of Israel, the longing to see the face of God and be seen by God. Through him, the great light of liberation has dawned, the gathering of God's people is fulfilled. By following Him we are tasked to continue the gathering of all people to God like St. Agnes. Jesus called St. Agnes to greater intimacy with Him and be an instrument of His love and care to others. We are all called to be partners of God in

spreading the Good News that His kingdom is in our midst inviting us to allow God's loving power reign in our hearts Viva St. Agnes! Pray for us!

January 15, 2023 – ORDINARY TIME

After the celebration of the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, we begin the Ordinary Time of our liturgy. Ordinary Time refers to those periods that fall outside of the major liturgical seasons and they are not ordinary at all. It does not mean that it is not important. Ordinary Time is called "ordinary" because the weeks are numbered. The Latin word ordinalis, which refers to numbers in a series, stems from the Latin word ordo, from which we get the English word order. Thus, the numbered weeks of Ordinary Time, represent the ordered life of the Church—the period in which we live our lives neither in feasting (as in the Christmas and Easter seasons) or in more severe penance (as in Advent and Lent), but in watchfulness and expectation of the Second Coming of Christ. Therefore, Ordinary Time is the part of the year in which Christ, the Lamb of God, walks among us and transforms our lives. There's nothing "ordinary" about that! The liturgical color for Ordinary Time is green which refers to spiritual growth. It means movement of time towards its fulfillment and that fulfillment is Jesus who is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. God is the author of time. Sunday is the sacrament of redeemed time and like all sacraments it is simultaneously a point of arrival and departure for Christians on their way to the fullness of the kingdom. Celebration of Sunday is the identifying mark of the Christian community which comes together, remembering that on the first day of the week the Lord of life was raised up and creation came at last to completion. That is why every Sunday is a celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord who defeated evil, sin and death forever. Thus, Ordinary Time is faithful, prayerful and active vigilance for the Glorious Coming of the Lord.

-January 8, 2023 - GOD ABOVE ALL ELSE

Happy New Year! We started this New Year 2023 by celebrating Mary, the Holy Mother of God. And it is fitting because Mary is the Mother of the Redeemer and the redeemed as well. Through her unconditional yes, God who is invisible became visible. That is our task this new year, to make God visible by putting him above all else in our lives and by becoming partners of God in transforming our world, creating new heavens and new earth. Like our Patroness, St. Agnes, at a young age she understood already that her life was not about herself but about God, to serve the plans and purpose of God. And God's plan and purpose is our well being, our wholeness, our salvation. Jesus said that your joy may be complete and that you have fullness of life. On January 21st, we will celebrate the feast day of our Patroness and it is important that we imitate her by following her great love of Jesus and spreading her heroic life story. St. Agnes, also called Saint Agnes of Rome, virgin and patron saint of girls, is one of the most celebrated Roman martyrs. According to tradition, Agnes was a beautiful girl, about 12 or 13 years old, who refused marriage, stating that she could have no spouse but Jesus Christ. Her suitors revealed her Christianity, which was condemned as a cult, and in punishment she was exposed in a brothel. Awed by her purity and presence, all but one of the Roman youths left her untouched; in his attempt to violate her, the sole attacker was miraculously struck blind, whereupon Agnes healed him with prayer. Later, after refusing to renounce her faith, she was

murdered during the persecution of the Christians by the Roman emperor Diocletian and was buried beside the Via Nomentana. As we celebrate the New Year, let us imitate the virtue and courage of St. Agnes by making God visible in our lives through our faith, compassion, mercy and love.

January 1, 2023 - GOD AMONG US

God pitched His tent among us! This is God's dream! To be one of us, human like us in all our weaknesses, limitations and vulnerabilities. For a child is born to us! God fulfilled his promise of salvation by sending his only begotten Son to us. He is the fullness of love, the greatest sign of God's love. Jesus is fully human and fully divine. That is why, Christmas is always a celebration of love, joy, of giving and sharing. Our Christian life therefore is a joyful life because God is present in our journey. He walks with us. Jesus manifested himself two thousands years ago to the shepherds, to the wise men, to Mary and Joseph, to his disciples. They recognized him and accepted him as the Messiah and Savior. However, his own people rejected him especially the powerful. In our times today God continues to manifest himself in many ways. At times we recognize him. Other times we reject him. We encounter God in our day to day experience. In moments of trials, sufferings, joys, triumphs, hopes, fears, defeats and successes that come to us each day, God is there. This reminds me of a story of a woman who dreamed that Jesus would visit her the next day. The following morning, she cleaned the house thoroughly, prepared a sumptuous meal and put on her best clothes. Later, a neighbor came to borrow money. But she did not entertain her neighbor's plea because her mind was on her expected visitor. Another asked her to watch their sick child. She also turned down the request. A third came to ask for her help to settle a misunderstanding in the family but again she refused. Meanwhile, Jesus failed to show up at the woman's house. When Jesus appeared again in her dream that evening, the woman asked why he failed to keep his promise. Jesus told her he did come three times but was turned away each time. How about us? How did God manifest to us? What was our response? Did we accept him or ignore him? God is with us. We only have to take the time to open our eyes and see; open our ears and hear; open our hearts and feel the presence of this God among us. May we all see and hear and feel and recognize the manifestations of God in our lives today and in each day to come.

December 25, 2022 - DREAM BIG

Advent is a time to prepare the way of the Lord. He comes to us and we are invited to repent so that we are able to recognize His arrival. Repentance is metanoia, radical change of mind and heart, turning around, taking a new direction. That is why Advent is also a penitential season. It is a time of conversion and new beginning. The Lord comes to restore the life of God within us. We are created in the likeness and image of God and because of sin, that image is destroyed. Jesus is the greatest gift of God to us. It is God's initiative to send His only begotten Son into the world. God loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son so that those who believe in Him may not perish but may have eternal life. Sin, evil and death are not part of God's original plan. They entered into our lives because of our disobedience.

God wants the best of us and He never gives up on us because He believes in us. By sending Jesus to us, we are given a chance to begin a new life and regain our original identity and dignity. It is Jesus who restores the life of God within us so that we become truly sons and daughters of the Father and manifest that into the world. He restores the garden of paradise to us. Hence, advent season is a time to dream big because God gives us the best gift, and that is, Jesus. To dream big is to be open to God's plan and purpose for us and in the world. The dream of God is that we live with him forever in His kingdom. And that begins today when we accept the invitation to be partners of God.