



Holy Family Parish

29 Sugarloaf St.
South Deerfield, MA 01373

25 December 2021
Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord

**“For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord”
(Lk 2:11)**

Dear Friends,

Notice the words the angel uses in St. Luke’s Gospel: “a savior has been born for you...” (emphasis is mine). The impression that St. Luke gives us is that the birth of Christ is a gift – something given, freely, without cost or payment. A gift is something new, something I have not had before. In this case, in the birth of Christ, the gift is life. What is it that we typically “see” in a newborn? We see potential. A world of possibilities. A book waiting to be written. This is why I love Christmas because in the birth of Christ I don’t see new life, new potential or possibilities in Him ... I see those in me. “A savior has been born for you...” For you, for me... I see in the birth of Christ new life in me, a chance to start fresh in the new year and write a new chapter in my own book.

Christmas also provides the opportunity to reflect upon the year that was once a blank page. For me personally this has been a year marked with significant difficulty and yet renewed joy. As a diocese we welcomed a new Bishop who has brought some life back to Catholics in Western Massachusetts. In February, the new “boss” appointed me to a very demanding position: Director of Vocations Recruiting. This new position has been a challenge. The lack of vocations in the diocese is critical and has pulled me away from the parish more often than I envisioned. The balance between the two “jobs” has been tough. Yet, in doing so, it has brought a lot of energy, joy and life to my own priesthood. Traveling around the diocese, preaching on the priesthood and about the life of a parish priest only reminds me about how much I love being a priest, how much I love being the pastor of our parish. Each day is an exciting adventure that makes life as a priest so exciting.

Not everything about this year has been so terrific, however. I know many have been angry over the lack oversight in some areas of parish administration. Again, the balance between vocations work and the parish proved difficult. My priority has always been to lead us in holiness, to a deeper encounter with God. Secondly, to be a good steward of the parish’s resources. I would like to take moment to address some of these issues:

St. Stanislaus Cemetery: I want to apologize for the lack of oversight in lawn care this past summer in the cemetery. This was a huge mistake on my part. The issue has to do with income. We do not generate a large cash flow to keep up with necessary landscaping. The generosity of some folks allowed for the overgrown areas to be cleaned up and the trees trimmed. I would like to install a fence along the road where the trees were cut down. But the price of fencing is too much at this time. Furthermore, I am currently in contact with the Diocese of Springfield Cemeteries Office to possibly turn over management to their office. They have the equipment, funds, and crew necessary for continued upkeep. This will hopefully solve any further issues. No final decision on this has been made.

Sign of Peace: My concern here is mainly reverence. We must not forget that this is not a social gesture but rather one of communion and reconciliation – one that occurs at a very solemn point in the Mass, within the context of our worship of God. Reverence for this moment is essential. Furthermore, while we are still “knee deep” in the pandemic and now the flu season, is this the right time to bring it back? As I have said previously, I am not opposed but I am cautious. I simply ask for your patience until it is the right time.

Music Program: A church musician is not the most lucrative position and becoming somewhat of a lost art. This makes finding one extremely difficult. I believe we have found two talented organists to help rebuild our music program here. For that we need to give thanks to God! Volunteers are needed to join our choir and to cantor at the 8am Sunday Mass. I ask your help and continued patience as we move forward.

I know that I have made some mistakes in these above areas, and I want to again extend my sincerest apologies for any lack of oversight and misunderstandings that have occurred in the past year. I assure you that my heart is and always has been in this parish. My heart is yours. For me, the real gift is to be your pastor.

When I reflect on the mystery of the nativity, of the life that Christ offers, a new hope arises within my own heart for a deeper faith in His promises, a life of greater devotion and love for our Lord. My promise is to lead you as we journey together in a greater communion with God and one another. May the graces of the Christmas Season help us to become a gift for one another. Please know that you are kept close to my heart and in my prayers. Please pray for me as well!

Merry Christmas!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Jon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Fr. Jon