



December 2014
Volume 87 Number 10

From the Clergy Associate for Family Ministries

December Message

From his sabbatical John Hartnett sent me a tremendous gift in the form of a book titled *Sabbath in the Suburbs: A Family's Experiment with Holy Time* by MaryAnn McKibben Dana. I commend it to you. No, I strongly urge you to read it cover to cover. Her writing is refreshing, non-judgmental, and inspiring. She wrestles with the passage of time, the pressures and demands of parenting, and the blessed gift of Sabbath rest in the endeavor. It's hard to know how to choose a favorite passage. My copy has post-it notes sticking out everywhere.

Sabbath time, as Dana describes it, is time spent not trying to change anything... time spent honoring time itself as a holy gift...time spent savoring life instead of missing it in our hurry and worry. Practicing Sabbath challenges the modern family. And yet, as her own experience testifies, the very process of wrestling with the endeavor bears fruit.

As I've reflected upon the book, the following songs come to mind, both from the deep recesses of my childhood:

Simon and Garfunkel's "Slow down, you move too fast. You've got to make the morning last, just kicking down the cobblestones, looking for fun and feeling groovy..."

Over the past several months I've found myself singing these words to my daughters and being chastened in the very singing of them because I'm realizing that they, too, are caught up in the frenzy of packing too much into the week without slowing down enough to enjoy the view. Modeling healthy habits for them to emulate is up to me.

MaryAnn McKibben Dana's book has provided the perfect invitation. And the truth is that everyone benefits when I slow down.

We all benefit from slowing down and taking time to honor and give thanks for the abundance that we enjoy. Thanksgiving should not be a once a year holiday, but a daily engagement culminating in weekly (minimally) participation in worship and the Eucharist.

In a recent conversation with the Confirmation class, we discussed how the word “Eucharist” means Thanksgiving. In simple terms, we give thanks for divine love and sacrifice for all of us every time we break bread together and recall Jesus’ words to his disciples as he broke bread with them. There was a time when I did not appreciate the sublime power of participation in the Eucharist. Now I’m not sure how to articulate my experience of divine love and power in the Eucharist. As I told the Confirmation class, I know better how to talk about how I miss the Eucharist when I do not participate in it. And now I can appreciate the vows made at my baptism that I confirmed as an adult at my confirmation, particularly the promise “to continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers.” (BCP, page 304).

Attending to each element of this promise requires discipline. It is like preventative medicine in many ways. In good times, developing the routine, making practice habitual, provides a firm foundation upon which to stand when times get tough. We spoke about how much of the spiritual life involves tending to the formation of habits and routines and disciplines, just as any other daily practices require: exercise, study, patience, attentiveness, kindness, taking vitamins and drinking morning coffee. As with any established routine, it gives shape to what before had no definition, and as such, we miss the practice when we do not keep it up.

While on the one hand, participation in the Eucharist goes far beyond routine, on the other hand, I have found that my experience of grace and beauty in the Eucharist has often happened since the discipline of participation has become second nature.

To that end, I believe that through spiritual practices, particularly through regular participation in the Eucharist, we make room, we prepare ourselves to notice Jesus’ presence. We experience the mystery of that presence which, despite centuries of theological debate, cannot be contained in human articulation.

The Eucharist is one profound (and in my experience unparalleled) way we encounter God’s presence. Another opportunity for encountering the divine is through art and music. These, in concert with the Eucharist, lift us to new heights in communion with God. And thanks be to God we have an abundance of beauty here at St. Elizabeth’s and, therefore, enjoy many incredible musical pieces that give depth to the mystery and wonder of the Eucharist and the transformation to which we are called through time spent in God’s presence.

As I type, the Taizé chant that happens to be resounding in my heart and soul is the following:
Peace before us, peace behind us, peace under our feet. Peace within us, peace over us, let all around us be peace.

Love before us, love behind us, love under our feet. Love within us, love over us, let all around us be love.

Light before us, light behind us, light under our feet. Light within us, light over us, let all around us be light.

Christ before us, Christ behind us, Christ under our feet. Christ within us, Christ over us, let all around us be Christ.

Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.

Serving in this parish is a divine blessing full of wonder and mystery and love.

A blessed Advent and Merry Christmas to you all.

Cathy Quinn
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