

BULLETIN -- DECEMBER 13

Advent penance opportunities. You will find several priests available for confessions at the following locations and times this week:

Sun., Dec. 13, 3 p.m.	St. James
Mon., Dec. 14, 7 p.m.	St. Isidore's
Thurs., Dec. 17, 6-7:30 p.m.	Holy Family, Caledonia

Remember: Confession is not only good for the soul; it's good for *everybody*.

Thank you to some generous members of the flock for a very thoughtful note that came in last week. You and God know who you are. I am humbled by your kindness. Blessings on you and yours!

News of former members. Karen Thompson once lived with her family at 1516 Hamilton N.W. She has been living in North Carolina for some years, but the pancreatic cancer which was diagnosed in 2004 has taken its toll and her family is exploring hospice care for her. She is moving to Lansing to be with her children and siblings. Her children are Tana, Ian, Kayla, and Cameron. We assure Karen and all her family of our prayers.

"I didn't get to know Jesus." According to many Protestant pastors, especially those who have become Catholic, that was the most frequent reason they heard about the Catholic Church when former Catholics came to join their churches. Which has to leave us wondering, just whose words did they think they had been hearing in the Gospel as it was being proclaimed to them? Just whose Body and Blood did they think they were receiving? Just whose perfect offering to God the Father did they think they were participating in when they came to Mass?

Ah, but there's the problem. Three little participles: *hearing, receiving, and participating!* Were they actually *doing* those things? That would explain a lot. What we presume should be happening in the minds and hearts of the participants when we celebrate the liturgy might not be happening at all -- but it might be much more the fault of human weakness rather than the fault of the Church.

Some time ago, someone complained that they weren't learning anything about their faith here at SS. Peter & Paul. I suggested that at least they might read the bulletin. Besides my other rantings, I do try to expose and explain Catholic teaching as I write this column. After all, I can't vocalize it too well anymore, so I have to write. The response was, "I don't read the bulletin." I mentioned that we have Catholic instruction classes each Sunday after Mass and Scripture study on Wednesday evenings. "I don't go to those." I pointed out that we have the monthly diocesan *Faith* magazine mailed to *all* of our households, and we have issues of *The Catholic Weekly* newspaper available for free in church. "I don't read newspapers or magazines." I was running out of ammo. Suddenly, it occurred to me that I'd missed referring to an obvious opportunity. How about the homily and the very liturgy itself? Certainly these are instructive even as they are presenting and celebrating the very mysteries of the faith themselves! "I get too distracted at Mass. My mind wanders." At least they might try listening to Catholic

radio and learn about things *that* way. “I don’t like talk radio.” I was finally at the point of exasperation. Perhaps, I suggested to the dear inquirer, the problem is with *you*, not with the Church or the parish. “I figured you’d probably say that,” they replied. “I guess I’ll just start going to another church.” I wish that church luck, I thought to myself as the person walked away.

I’ve heard the same thing from people of all ages who have left the Church. They just couldn’t get answers to their questions, Masses were boring, sermons were bad, people weren’t friendly, no one ever talked about the Bible, and they never got to know Jesus. And frankly, I don’t believe them. Any more than I would believe someone who complained that their car wouldn’t start, when I knew they had never put the key into the ignition. You’ve got this great big beautiful machine all around you, but you have to do *something*, for cryin’ out loud! And if you’re content to let it sit there with weeds growing up around it while you complain that it doesn’t work, when you haven’t *engaged* it, it’s hard for me to understand how or why I should have to come up with all the answers for you.

We have lots of people in our society today who don’t value money or other material goods because everything has been given to them without a demand for anything in return. They come to think of these things as their right. It never occurs to them that other people are working hard and paying taxes so that they can have things they’ve never earned. In fact, they think of working people as lucky, rich, and foolish, and can’t imagine living any other way than off the public dole. We have the same thing in the spiritual life. Those “church people” know all the inside scoop, they think they’re better than everybody else, they think they can tell other people how to live. Look at the broken lives of many of these people who have basically abandoned their faith and ask, “How’s that workin’ for ya?”

So when you hear someone complaining about the Church or even the parish, ask them how much they tried to get *engaged* with it. Do they just like to blame their own laziness and lack of energy on someone else, or did they indeed have a real problem that could be remedied by our doing something differently? And, if they’re not willing to try again, it doesn’t sound like they were really too interested in it in the first place. After all, if they sensed that something was wrong with their health, and the first doctor’s analysis wasn’t satisfactory, wouldn’t they be seeking a second opinion? If it really mattered to them?

“I was in prison, and you came to visit.” Well, perhaps that’s not your particular call or gift as a member of the Body of Christ. (If it is, though, get busy!) Whatever the case, there are many ways to carry out the command of Christ outlined for his disciples in Matthew 25. Our Diocesan Prison/Jail Ministry invites our donations to the annual Christmas Drive. This year they are collecting **NEW (PACKAGED) white tube socks and NEW reading glasses with PLASTIC frames in +1.00 to +1.75 strengths**. Your donated items will be used at the various jails, shelters, and juvenile detention centers within our diocese. We must have the donations in our box at the back of church by December 15 for inclusion in the inmates’ Christmas packages. Thank you, and God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: Afraid of the sacrament of penance? Afraid to go to confession? Something you did, long ago or recently, eating away at you and you don't know how to say it? On the unfathomable mercy of God, ponder these lines as if Christ himself were saying them to you:

Nothing you confess
Could make me love you less.