

BULLETIN -- DECEMBER 24

Christmas Mass schedule. You'll find it elsewhere in this bulletin also, but please note that there is Vigil Mass for Christmas on Sunday afternoon at 4:00. The "Mass at Midnight" will be at 10 p.m. Sunday evening, and then we shall have a Mass on Christmas morning at 9:30. **Next weekend**, the usual weekend schedule will be in effect. Note, however, that the Solemnity of the Mother of God, January 1, is a holyday, but not of obligation this year. Thus there will be no vigil Mass on Sunday afternoon, and only the 8 a.m. Mass on Monday morning. Those wishing to participate at Mass at another hour will find a convenient schedule for other local churches elsewhere in this bulletin.

We welcome our guests and visitors, as well as parishioners past and present, to celebrate the great feast of the Lord's Incarnation with us. Please accept our promise of prayer for a wonderful Christmas as you come "home" to spend some time with family and friends.

Incarnational giving. It's also known as putting flesh on the bones of faith! We acknowledge the generosity of all of our donors to the Catholic Services Appeal to assist the work of the Church beyond the boundaries of the parish. We received refund checks from the Diocese in November for **\$1,668.33** and in December for **\$723.33**, bringing our total over target to over \$25,000 for the current fiscal year. That means that by fulfilling your pledges to CSA, you have provided another \$25,000+ to support our various apostolates of worship, Catholic education, and Christian service right here at the parish. We strongly encourage all of our parishioners to participate in this annual campaign. Together, we do many beautiful things for the glory of God.

Church employment opportunity. St. Anthony's parish in Saranac is looking for a part-time bookkeeper-bulletin editor-parish office secretary. If interested, please submit a resumé to ST ANTHONY CHURCH, 3936 JACKSON RD, SARANAC MI 48881. You may also call St. Anthony's parish office on Wednesdays for more details, (616) 642-6119. E-mail: stanthonysar@att.net.

Roll over, but don't play dead! Did you know that Congress retroactively reinstated the ability to make charitable gifts from your Individual Retirement Accounts (IRA)? Did you know that your parish or other favorite non-profit organizations may qualify for these charitable rollovers? If you are 70½ or older, you can transfer as much as \$100,000 from your IRA directly to a non-profit entity without having to count any of the transfer as taxable income. This charitable rollover will also benefit you in that it would count toward your required minimum distribution for 2017.

The good news is that there still is time to take advantage of this opportunity for 2017. For those who take mandatory distributions in December, 2017, you can donate that money to the diocese or parish or organizations such as Holy Family Radio, and not have the distribution subject to tax. If you are considering making such a gift, please contact your accountant or financial adviser for further information on how you could

benefit from making a charitable rollover to support the mission of your favorite charities.

Marriage need refreshing? Being in a troubled or unhappy marriage at any time is difficult. Through the holidays it's even harder. Divorce filings soar in January because people tend to wait till after the hustle and bustle of the season, for a whole variety of reasons. You can do better than that. Rediscover healing and love, and find hope by attending Retrouvaille (reh-troh-VYE). The program offers tools needed to rediscover a loving marriage relationship. You had it once. Why not rekindle it instead of snuffing it out? The next Retrouvaille weekend in our area begins March 23, 2018. The next will begin on September 28. For more information, to register, or to sponsor a couple, call (616) 752-7004, or e-mail retrograndrapids@gmail.com, or visit the website, retrouvaille.org.

As an incarnational Church, we owe our many non-Christian and non-believing friends and neighbors a loving exposure to the full truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They often howl bloody murder when we attempt to do so, accusing us of violating the "wall of separation" between Church and state. That wall is found nowhere in the Constitution or Bill of Rights, but was a mere reference in a private letter Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1802. In recent years it has been used in attempts to silence any religious viewpoint in the public square, which is exactly where Christ expects his disciples to live out the Gospel and make it known to others.

The Gospels are not only accounts of Christ's life, they are intended to provide the fundamentals of his teaching. He is the Word made Flesh, spoken by the Father in living color as an illustration for us of the eternal will of God for the human family. Our duty as his followers is to make these truths known. His Holy Spirit guides the Church to answer the thorny questions of every age in the light of Christ's teachings. Things like nuclear weapons, space exploration, and the Internet with all of its social media possibilities were nowhere on the radar when the Son of God walked the earth. (For that matter, neither was the radar!) The Church, as the living extension of Christ in space and time, has Christ's authority to teach in his name regarding those things which the human mind had not yet conceived in the first century A.D.

If anyone voices an opinion or a complaint during this Christmas season about why the Church is so set for this or against that, you can charitably explain that we don't have a choice. It is Christ who expects us to manifest his preferential option for the poor through the works of mercy. It is Christ who wants to nourish his people with Word and Sacrament in the regular (weekly or more often) celebration of worship and thanksgiving that we call the Mass. It is Christ who is with priest and penitent in the sacrament of penance to absolve sinners and return them fit for duty as his witnesses. It is Christ who teaches us the supreme value of human life from conception until natural death, something which has come under terrible attack worldwide in the last half century. It is Christ, the Lamb and Bridegroom of his Bride the Church, who is the pattern for the permanent commitment of man and woman to each other in marriage, for the security and stability of the children whom God entrusts to them through their love. It is in Christ that we are called to lose ourselves in love so that we can become the very best version of ourselves. In becoming identified with him, we gain our new and most important identity

as children of God and co-heirs with Christ of the Kingdom which he has died to make possible for us. These eternal truths never lose their freshness and vitality, and they are essential for the true flourishing of the human family.

So when we discuss some of these timely and challenging topics in the bulletin in the weeks ahead, do your best to “think with the Church” (*sentire cum Ecclesia*, according to St. Ignatius Loyola), and to realize that Christ works through his Church to help us be equipped for the next A(trocity)-bomb the world wants to drop on us. As the DJ used to say, “The hits just keep on comin’!” And we’d better be ready, for **Christ’s** sake. He’s won the victory, but the evil one continues to engage us in skirmishes to try to keep us demoralized. God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: “Christmas is built upon a beautiful and intentional paradox; that the birth of the homeless should be celebrated in every home” (Gilbert Keith Chesterton, English Catholic author, 1879-1935).