

PAST LETTERS FROM FR. KEN:

There's a very old joke about the boy throwing the alarm clock out the window because he wanted to see 'time fly'. It seems like just yesterday that we were sending the kids off to their first day of school and now the leaves are turning color, falling and our hearts and thoughts are tuned to Thanksgiving and beyond. I've heard dozens of people say, "I can't believe it's already November. This year is flying by faster than ever".

The passage of time is something we can't control – to an extent 'time' has control over us. We're limited in the number of things we can do every day; we don't have the 'time' to do all the things we desire. This is not an observation just for our current age. In the second letter of Peter we find, "But there is one thing, my friends, that you must never forget: that with the Lord, 'a day' can mean a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day". And in this letter, Peter himself is quoting Psalm 90.

I believe that these words are reminder for us not to put off to tomorrow what we truly need to do today – to become closer in our relationship with Jesus Christ. I find that too many people say that they don't have time for Sunday Mass, they don't have time to pray, they don't have time to strengthen their relationship which is unique – no one has the exact same relationship – because there are too many other things in the way.

The events that we witness in our world, the tensions we experience in our church, perhaps even the conflicts and pressures that are a part of our own family life, truly confirm that this is not the time to be standing alone – that we need a closer and more intimate relationship with God to successfully navigate all that confronts us because otherwise we are prone to apathy and despair.

The Old Testament Book of ECCLESIASTES reminds us that there is nothing new under the sun – that is that all we experience has been known by every generation before us going all the way back to the beginning of time. The author observes that there is a time for everything, a time for every occupation under heaven. There is a time to be born, a time for dying; a time for laughter, a time for mourning. There is a time for speaking and a time for silence; a time even for war and a time for peace.

With this in mind, may we remember that there is always a time for prayer, time to spend with God because God is eternal. Although 'time' has no meaning for God – an everlasting present – no past/no future – we are mortal beings. We have a definite beginning and a definite end. Too many people have begged for one final wish within that lifespan – "Please give me a little more time".

Is time running out? That I don't know. What I do know is the time is now – now is the proper time, now is the proper hour, for us to gather together in prayer and worship to pray for one another, for healing, for comfort, and yes, to pray for holiness. The prayer of Our Mass – the prayer of Jesus Christ himself – is a prayer for unity – A Comm-union with our God and with one another. We are "One Bread – One Body". There is truth to the saying that when we pray by ourselves, we pray alone. That when we pray with others, each is praying with us and for us and in this unity, we pray more strongly for one another. For each person, there is indeed a time for solitude. Yet perhaps more importantly, this is the time for unity in prayer that we might together ask God's guidance to lead us safely through these tumultuous times.

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I'm told that my last letter was around Eastertide and that seems like a very long time ago. This is my 14th letter on the website, my latest attempt to share the message of the gospel with as many people as possible who might log on – either accidentally or purposefully.

It is summer and as I write, the forecast is for at least three days of hot, humid, weather with hazy sunshine with temperatures in the 90's. And unless you're blessed with being in an air-conditioned place (and hopefully most of us are) these can be long and miserable days of feeling blah, with tempers as hot as the thermometer and sweat pouring down your forehead into your eyes with the least little movement.

If you've heard the expression 'hot as hell', it's an apt saying - as the summer season is the appropriate time to think of our spiritual state as we try to keep our physical bodies comfortable. We don't like to talk about Hell. It makes us uncomfortable - as well it should. But Jesus speaks not only about the reality of the devil, he also speaks about the fires of Gehenna.

We remember the story in Luke's Gospel (16:18) about the rich man and Lazarus. After they both die, we hear that the rich man suffered the torment of Hades and asks that Lazarus dip his finger in water to cool his tongue for "I am in agony in these flames." We know that the rich man was NOT condemned for being rich but for not sharing his blessing with the poor.

In Mark's Gospel (9:47-48), Jesus speaks about those things that lead us to sin. If you hand or foot or eye should cause you to sin, it is better to get rid of them and to enter the Kingdom of Heaven maimed or crippled or blind than to be "thrown into hell where the worm does not die nor the fire go out." Here Jesus is using what is known as Semitic Exaggeration to remind us that even though doing harm to one's self is evil, it is still not as bad as what hell is.

Although the famous scene of St. Matthew's description of the Final Judgment does not mention the fires of hell, it is obvious that Jesus is speaking about eternal punishment. The bottom line is simple, however. Gehenna, Hell, Hades, the realm of Satan is to be avoided at all costs; the loss of the Kingdom of God for all eternity is itself Hell.

For those times that we suffer physically – from the heat and humidity, from a physical injury, from mental anguish - any of these cannot begin to compare with the spiritual suffering we will experience if we do not live by Jesus' words. "This is my commandment – Love one another as I have loved you". We literally cannot imagine the extreme horrors of what Hell is like just as St. Paul remarks in his First Letter to the Corinthians that the wonders of heaven are beyond us as well. "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard nor has it entered the mind of man of the things God has prepared for those who love Him".

Let us pay attention to our physical discomforts in life so that we may one day know the truth of Paul's words in death!

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EASTER!!! The most dramatic event in Human History – the most unwitnessed event in Human History. Think about it – no one actually saw Jesus rise from the grave. So many Easter Cards portray Jesus, glorious, holding a staff with a flag of victory waving in a gentle breeze. While the Resurrection of the Son of God may have occurred in this fashion, that actual moment is beyond human recognition. That moment when Christ rose gloriously from the sleep of death is a DIVINE MOMENT beyond human definition. EASTER IS A GOD MOMENT when we are promised a similar divine moment – for all eternity.

All the encounters of Jesus with his disciples were AFTER the experience of the empty tomb. Actually, this should not at all surprise or shock us. Most of us have a very dramatic and Hollywood image of Jesus rising from the dead. Yet, as with his birth, when the great majority of the population of Bethlehem was asleep and had no idea that the Son of God was born in a stable, here too, despite numerous times when Jesus said that the Son of Man must suffer and die and on the third day rise again, his disciples did not camp out opposite the cave in joyful expectation. Rather, they locked themselves away in the upper room, fearing for their own safety.

If we go to the end of the 27th Chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, after Jesus is entombed on Good Friday, the Chief Priests and Pharisees ask Pilate to place a guard at the tomb to ensure that the disciples of Jesus do not steal the body with the claim that he had just risen as he preached (Mt27:62-66). Matthew records for us that as the women approached the tomb an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, rolled away the boulder and sat on it, scaring the guards so badly they were like dead men.

If we go to the 16th chapter of St. Mark's Gospel, the women encounter an angel who tells them that though they are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, he is risen, he is not here, and to go to his disciples and Peter to tell them he will meet them

in Galilee. And yet perhaps one of the most beautiful lines in the resurrection narratives (at least for me) is found in the Gospel of Luke 24:5. WHY LOOK FOR THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD? HE IS NOT HERE; HE IS RISEN.

It is a simple statement by an angel to the women who had come to anoint His body, yet dramatic and forceful. None of our notions of that Easter Morning can compare to the reality of the Power of God – the Power of God’s Love. No matter what we may imagine about Jesus rising from the tomb – our imaginations fail; we can’t quite grasp the enormity of what happened to Jesus – what will happen to us! In his 1st letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul writes that ‘eye has not seen, ear not heard, nor the mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.’ The Love of Jesus for His Father was Perfect – It is that same LOVE FOR US that will bring us to Perfection as well.

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I can’t believe that as I write this letter that the month of January is half over. Although many might suppose that with the Christmas and New Year’s celebrations finished that there would be a lull in activity, life in the church doesn’t slow down. There is always something happening at St. Rose that allows us to interact with so many of you.

On the next day after the New Year’s Day observance, on that very same day schools reopened after the Christmas Break, we started with the first of five nights to celebrate FIRST RECONCILIATION with our second graders who are also preparing for their First Holy Communion. There have been five separate evenings and Saturday afternoons when parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters have gathered to witness both the nervousness and anticipation of these young parishioners in receiving forgiveness of their sins. Obviously, they do not at this age have any serious or mortal sins, yet, as we all personally know, the experience of owning up to one’s faults – even minor ones – is cleansing. The ability to say, “I’m sorry”, and to hear, “You’re forgiven” is freeing.

Our EPIPHANY DAY concert – on January 6th – the 12th Day of Christmas - was especially wonderful this year. Not only did all our parish’s choirs participate, but our First Grade children made of wonderful portrayal of angels, shepherds, stable animals, and wise men from the East. These magi, of course, were guided by a star – a ‘living star’ to the manger where they found Mary and Joseph (real and new parents) and the child Jesus (a real baby!)

Sunday January 13th – THE SOLEMNITY OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD – saw Auxiliary Bishop Andrzej Zglejszewski present at our 9:30 Family Liturgy for our “BLUE MASS”. A Blue Mass is one where police, fire, and first responders are invited to be thanked in a special way for their service to the community. At the end of the Mass, the bishop blessed all the emergency vehicles parked outside the church that morning before greeting these tremendous civil servants at a reception in our gym.

As you’ve read about some of the life of our church above, I hope you get the distinct impression that the parish of St. Rose of Lima is both a lively and prayerful place. We have a place for you here, and I invite you to discover the both deep spiritually and many service ministries that exist here - even if you’re not sure what you personally may be looking for.

The Catholic Church, priests and bishops have received ‘bad press’ in recent years. We have brought this upon ourselves by the acts of sexual abuse and its cover up. Yet despite failure and sinfulness within this church which is the Body of Christ with Jesus Himself as the Head of the Body, there are many holy people, many dedicated people who have given themselves to the service of bringing anyone and everyone closer to Jesus. That’s what all the events and liturgies and prayers that I mentioned above are all about - offering the opportunity, in a world that is often dark and off-putting - a place and a reason to lift our minds and hearts to God and to discover that God is only waiting for us to do this as a community of faith.

In this New Year, I invite you to re-examine your relationship with Jesus Christ. Are we consistent in practicing our faith? Do we use Sunday as anything but a ‘day of rest’ in keeping Holy the Sabbath? Do we spend time in true prayer or do we merely mumble words? Would we and our families benefit by making Sunday Mass a greater priority? Many areas where we once looked for security and stability are not living up to their past reputations. May we find a certainty in the love of Jesus Christ and may the faith family of St. Rose be a place where you can find His Love more easily.

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In this website letter, I'd like to share a recent article I read in the Catholic Magazine, "America". The article is titled "Failure to Protect, A survivor's lessons from 50 years of service to the church", by John Carr. "He worked with Law, McCarrick and Vigano. Here's what he learned": Please [click to read the complete article](#). Please feel free to contact me if you'd like to discuss.

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In this website letter, I'd like to use some of this space to share a little of my recent evening of prayer...with some of the Catechists of the parish. First of all, a Catechist is a person who exercises a ministry by teaching about the Catholic Faith by Word and Example. In the early centuries in the life of the church, one who took on the role of a Catechist was responsible for preparing those who desired to be followers of Jesus Christ for the reception of the Sacrament of Baptism. The catechist walked with the newly baptized during a period of enlightenment for the 50 day period from Easter to Pentecost. The Catechist possessed a formal office in the life of the church and was formally installed as qualified to teach about the faith by the bishop or more usually by the local pastor to assist him.

Our Catechists – and catechists – all around the diocese and the country usually focus on teaching our faith to children who have already been baptized and are now in school. Catechists in our parish are parents or grandparents or parishioners whose children are grown and have taken on the serious responsibility of guiding our children in the practice of the faith. They teach either in our school or at their homes on a weekly basis – supplementing and strengthening what – hopefully – parents are already teaching and sharing about their own faith. To any of you reading this, St. Rose is always looking for qualified Catechists to help our youngsters learn about and embrace their faith. This is especially true for our Confirmation preparation program known as "Chosen". If you have an interest in sharing your faith by Word and by Example, please call me at the rectory for an interview and I would be happy to speak with you.

Getting back to the original thought for this column, the focus of my talk was the importance of the Eucharist and receiving Holy Communion taken from a number of statements made by Pope Francis. Since the beginning of the history of the church, the celebration of the Eucharist has always been CENTRAL – the reception of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ – a personal union with Jesus himself.

Pope Francis says something I think we've all heard many times, but perhaps haven't taken to heart as deeply as we might. "It's so important to go to Mass every Sunday because that's where people receive Christ who saves, forgives and unites EVERYONE to his father, church and each other." The pope continues: "Mass is a time, not just to pray, but to receive communion. It's beautiful to do this". It is an incredibly moving thought that through the reception of Holy Communion, WE RECEIVE JESUS HIMSELF.

The two questions that I asked the catechists were simple ones. First, I asked whether their students believed this. Thank God their answer was "Yes" because in surveys over the past 25 years, fewer and fewer Catholics confidently answer "Yes" in declaring Christ's REAL PRESENCE in the Eucharist. The second question I asked is "What do they FEEL when they receive Holy Communion?" and I acknowledged that whatever they may experience in the reception of Holy Communion is something very personal.

Nonetheless, I ask you those same two questions. Do YOU affirm the True Presence of Jesus Christ in the consecrated host you receive at the time of Holy Communion? What do You personally FEEL at that moment? These are important questions because it shapes 'Why' we attend Mass (or better still – participate in the Mass); 'How Often' we are present' and 'What' or 'Who' we bring home with us. What we FEEL in those moments after we've received the host should have an effect on who we are, how we treat others, and our attitudes in general. Do we FEEL the Lord's presence within – and if Not, we must ask ourselves, "Why Not"?

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If I asked you to imagine that first Christmas, the birth of the Only-Begotten Son of God in a stable in Bethlehem, you could probably do a very good job of it in all the visible details. So many movies and Christmas cards have provided us with a very keen idea of Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus, the angels, the shepherds and their surroundings outside the city.

If I asked you to describe the crucifixion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, again a number of well-done movies have given us very graphic accounts of those last hours in Jesus' life. We can imagine Jesus standing before Pilate, the long grueling walk with the cross on his shoulders up the hill of Calvary, people jeering and throwing garbage at him all along the way. Films have captured in all too minute detail the hammering of the nails into Jesus' hands and feet and the lance being thrust

into his side. Both a birth in poverty and a gruesome death are aspects in life that are all too common and while disturbing, are a part of our experience.

Yet when you think about it, if I asked you to imagine Easter, the moment of Christ's resurrection from the dead, it would be far more difficult. Despite the multiplicity of Easter cards depicting Jesus standing at the edge of the tomb, his staff and pennant of victory waving in the dawn's first light, a nimbus of divine light surrounding Jesus with his eyes raised to heaven, we really have no way of depicting something that wasn't witnessed or recorded in real time. And we must wonder if video equipment had been on the scene, what, if anything, it might have captured. What actually occurred in the glorious resurrection and vindication of the Son of God is beyond us. The resurrection of Jesus is beyond our experience, yet the resurrection of Christ Jesus is the foundation of our faith. Everything we believe as Roman Catholics flows from the cross to the resurrection. The shedding of Jesus' blood upon the cross has little meaning without the resurrection.

So, the greatest event in history relies on the testimony of the four gospels, each of those evangelists in encountering the risen Jesus write more about what Jesus commands them to do than what they saw. St. Thomas places his finger in the nail marks and examines the wound in Jesus' side – bringing us to conclusion that he witnessed the crucifixion if from a distance – and comes to his own conclusion that this really is Jesus with a body the same yet different. On another occasion Jesus appears and asked for something to eat to demonstrate that he is not a ghost. Yet, for me, the most striking part of the resurrection narratives is that each encounter is presented with such simplicity and nonchalance that it is almost as if Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are looking back and thinking 'How could we have been so blind?'

In their writing, all four of the evangelists present the resurrection of Jesus as the natural conclusion of the earthly life of the Son of God who taught that the only commandment in life is to love God and to love one another. And that he who preached, healed the sick and forgave sinners both big and small had predicted his death and resurrection. They write about these resurrection encounters without fanfare but with a genuine and rock-hard faith that they are witnesses of all that occurred, now it's up to you to believe.

What's your image of the resurrection? Whatever you might picture – SLOWLY read the resurrection gospels. Indulge yourself in each scene and let yourself be uplifted in a new way at the thought that what happened to Jesus – is offered to us who follow in his footsteps.

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Lent! It can be a time when we hope to do better than last year. Lent can also be a time when we propose to target some weakness in our relationship with Jesus Christ and we actually do something about it. Even if we didn't begin to do this on Ash Wednesday, to begin to make some change in ourselves doesn't have to be obvious or overwhelming. Little and subtle changes over time can suddenly become very dramatic when finally noticed.

There is a neat story about an overweight man who finally decided that he needed to lose a great deal of weight. And his plan was simply to do his best to lose one pound a week. It doesn't sound like much since many of us get discouraged when significant changes don't occur quickly. Yet after a year he lost 52 pounds – a very solid achievement by anyone's reckoning. For the first three months he lost a mere 12 pounds and people he worked with didn't notice any change. Two months later, people began to whisper to one another, "There's something different about Ted. I'm sure of it, but I just can't put my finger on it". The secret to Ted's success certainly was that he was persistent and consistent in pursuing his goal. The pleasure that Ted derived when people began to comment was practically tangible, but more importantly he DIDN'T lose all that weight and then, once accomplishing his goal, he DIDN'T gain all of it back again. The transformation was permanent.

That's what we're aiming for in the Season of Lent – 40 days when we make a purposeful change (for the better) in our relationship with God and to keep that transformation permanent throughout the Season of Easter and beyond. It is wonderful that many persons give up a particular favorite food or snack during Lent in making a sacrifice to unite them in some small way to the sacrifice of Christ. Yet while beneficial in some ways, we go right back to savoring those foods or snacks in the Easter celebration – nothing in reality has changed! And why would we want to give up a favorite

permanently?? Too often the fasting or praying or the charitable acts we engage in for Lent, end at Easter – and the effect was that no permanent transformation took place. So, I believe we can say that it is more spiritually beneficial to make some little positive change during Lent that we can keep doing (joyfully) long after Lent is over.

Therefore, when talking about a ‘change of heart’, it is a true change of direction, even if by a small degree. There is also a story about a teenager who made the simple (and apparently easy) Lenten promise that she would say two Our Fathers each day. She not only continued that very simple but very effective promise throughout the Easter Season that year, but until the day of her death at 84. I’ll let you calculate how many Our Fathers were prayed in those next 65 years!

In the book of the Prophet Ezekiel (chapter 18) speaking through the prophet, God says that he DOES NOT WISH THE DEATH OF THE SINNER, but if they should change their ways and do what is right, they will not die but live. It is a very motivating promise – if we repent from the evil we have done in the past, it will not be held against us. And that we might not despair if we slip or fail, Jesus gives us the cleansing Sacrament of Reconciliation to help us to continue to forge ahead. So, what might be a weakness in your relationship with God? What do you desire to change, to strengthen to make better? Whatever it is, know that even a small change now can go a very long way!

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In Luke’s gospel, chapter 21, people were talking about the beauty and wonder of the Jewish place of worship, the Temple. Jesus comments that all the beauty that impresses them will be destroyed and not one stone will be left upon another. Obviously shocked, they ask when this will happen and what sign will there be that the destruction is about to take place.

Jesus answers and tells them not to be deceived when some will come using his name and saying the time is at hand. “And when you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened for this is something that must happen, but the end is not so soon...Nation will fight against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and plagues and famines here and there; there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.”

In recent months we have seen all sorts of fearful sights. The destructive power of nature in earthquakes, hurricanes, forest fires and floods. Terrorism, the response to terrorism, so many people around the world fleeing their homes to find some place, any place that is safe, exacerbating a situation already seemingly beyond a just solution. In the city of Las Vegas, we have also seen the fearful and devastating horror one man can inflict with a single gun. We have been made aware of so many unwanted advances against the human dignity of women, in Hollywood and on our streets. We are facing an epidemic of drug abuse and of opioid misuse from teens looking to ‘feel good’ to intelligent and mature men and women looking to ease some physical pain.

Although some would claim that all the above are signs of the end-times or of the displeasure God has with the human race, it is NOT at all the truth. Jesus is telling us that these frightful events, unfortunately, are a part of human, earthly life. All through history one could say that ‘these are the final days; the signs are being fulfilled’. And at times we bring some of our misfortunes upon ourselves. In a very real sense, in a world so full of troubles and uncertainties, justifiably, many people are looking for some comfort, guidance and protection. Unfortunately, too many are looking in all the wrong places, looking for a physical fix when they are really looking for a peace that the world cannot give. Whether they know it or not, they are looking to fill a void that cannot be filled with common items like money, power, drugs, sexual pleasure. They are searching for a feeling of calm beyond description; they are looking for the embrace of Jesus the divine physician.

As has been said and written so many times, Jesus begs us, “Come to me all you who labor and find life burdensome and I will give you rest.” As we approach the end of a year full of turmoil, this is a good time to come to evaluate whether we are looking for comfort and solace in the wrong places or could we and should we be looking for that comfort and solace in a deeper, more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. At the end of the Liturgical Year, many of the Sunday readings for mass do indeed speak about, being prepared, being awake, being conscientious and not being distracted. May we use these coming weeks, right through the Advent Season, opening ourselves to allow the source of all love to touch us, to heal us and to renew us.

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We enter this fall watching one hurricane named Harvey slam into Texas causing destruction and devastation beyond what we experienced with 'Superstorm Sandy'. You and I will never forget...those first few days (and for some weeks, months) afterward waiting for power, waiting for water to recede and drain from homes. There are some families still waiting to rebuild! I think that Long Island would probably sink under 20" of rain experienced by the city of Houston and its suburban areas. And at this writing another hurricane, with the innocent sounding name of Irma, even bigger and meaner, now taking careful aim at Florida with the roads already jammed with cars taking families to evacuation sites and hopefully to safety. They leave with their lives and with the hope that there will something left to return to. And as I write, now a large earthquake in Mexico.

North Korea is still playing nuclear games with the United States and any number of countries in Southeast Asia. We hear about a resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan even as ISIS is slowly being outfought in the Middle East. In our own country, we read about protests and counter-protests. We hear about the racism of those who proudly support White-Supremacy and the call for the rapid phase-out of DACA. And in our own town of Massapequa, we've experienced and hopefully moved beyond the great 6th grade debate.

There will always be, and I do mean always, be debate and argument, supposition and theory along with the extremely forceful (and sometimes overly forceful) presentation of conflicting ideas. What one may see as a part of history, another sees as racist. There will be questions as to the motivations which bring any of these thoughts and opinions to the fore and discussion in open and hopefully peaceful forum.

With all of the many fears we know too well, with all of the questions about why we are experiencing all the forces that nature has to throw at us and the problems of our own making as well, I constantly wonder why more people aren't in church on a Sunday morning. All the issues I've listed above can be easily tripled as vastly important areas which, if not handled correctly and compassionately, can lead to disaster, destruction and death. There's little we can do to control the course of nature (though many say we've already done too much). And so the question remains, "With all we are facing, why have so many Catholics abandoned attending Mass on a regular basis?"

Why not leave the world, with all the tensions and pressures behind for an hour and spend a short time in peace and prayerfulness? With all the divisions, the violence and distrustfulness we see in our world, it is the Eucharist which brings us union with Jesus Christ; it is the Eucharist which binds us together as one in the Body of Christ; a spiritual food which brings healing and solace. It is so important on a Sunday morning to bring a child to church and to demonstrate by your own action that this a priority. We send our children to religion classes and Catholic school to learn about our faith. We need to bring them to church to LIVE our faith, to experience the beauty of praying to for one another (especially those we may disagree with) and to know that all present are also praying for us. As we begin a new school year insuring that our children have all the items they need for success in class, let us also insure we give them all they need to become closer to Jesus.

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All through this year, along with the with the rest of the world, we have witnessed a growing number of terrorist attacks, especially in France and in England. More people than we even want to think about have been killed and wounded. Children, parents waiting for their children, pedestrians, couples and friends having a night out at an outdoor café. When we see the pictures of the bloodshed, when we hear of innocent people being bloodied and maimed, when we imagine our feelings our reaction if any of this happened to one of our loved ones, we can react with anger and rage, sorrow and despair. We can react with a desire for vengeance, a desire to inflict an even greater retribution and punishment upon those who care so little for life; the lives of others, even their own life.

We can react with violence. We can react with asking 'What's the use?' We also can react with prayer; a greater, more intense, a more fervent prayer than might be a part of our daily routine. Prayer may not change the situation, but prayer does change us. Prayer may not erase the headlines that weigh so heavily with sorrow on our hearts, but our prayer can influence what we will do and how we will react after reading those painful headlines.

As I have written in the past, there are 150 Psalms and there is a Psalm for every occasion, every feeling, every need. The behavior of humanity hasn't changed to a very great degree since the psalms were written, and so the feelings, the emotions, the prayers of the psalmist were no different then, as we still experience now. One of the psalms which I turn to quite frequently is Psalm 130. For those who pray the Divine Office of Hours, this psalm is a part of Night Prayer also known as Compline for Wednesdays. I hope this particular psalm brings you the same sense of solace which I feel in praying for sanity to return to our world.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; O Lord, hear my voice!

O let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleading.

If you, O Lord should mark our guilt, Lord, who would survive? But with you is found forgiveness: for this we revere you.

My soul is waiting for the Lord, I count on his word. My soul is longing for the Lord, more than the watchman for daybreak. Let the watchman count on daybreak and Israel on the Lord.

Because with the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption, Israel indeed he will redeem from all its iniquity.

I find comfort in this prayer in that I see it as a prayer both for the forgiveness of my sins and for the vindication that will be bestowed in acknowledging, both my personal guilt and my need for forgiveness. We pray and wait for the Lord God to touch our lives more than the ancient watchmen who peered out past the walls of a city waiting for dawn to bring safety from attack. As the watchmen knew dawn was inevitable, so our longing is for the Lord's justice which is even more inevitable. And let us know and take comfort that those who bare the mark of guilt for hatred, for various atrocities will not survive the final judgment.

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#### WHAT IS EASTER FOR YOU?

For many the Easter celebration (one that continues 50 days all the way to Pentecost) is simply a time of hope; a hope that our loved ones who have died experience a peace that the world never gave them and could never give. For some Easter is the ultimate expression of new life. All of nature is springing back to renewed life. The cycle of life, forlorn and bare during the winter and seemingly dead reappears in all its vernal glory. For others, Easter is a time of another kind of newness; new clothes, new fashions, a new look that helps us feel better about ourselves. For children, Easter is a time of an abundance of sweets; jelly beans, marshmallow eggs and chocolate (hopefully solid chocolate) rabbits. Easter vacation is a time off from school and being outdoors and care-free for a few days. Hopefully, for the greatest number of people, Easter is the celebration of the rising of Jesus from the dead.

All of these thoughts, especially the last, are true, and yet, each by itself falls short of what Our God desires that we know and feel about the most life-changing event in human history. If we are to understand the Easter Mystery, then truly we need to connect this mind-bending moment to the joyous mystery of Christmas, the Incarnation, The Son of God taking flesh and being born among us. Why was Jesus born? Jesus was born to preach the Good News of God's love for us, to suffer, to die, shedding his blood on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus was born for us, to die for us and to rise from the dead so that we too might accept His gift of eternal life.

Easter is culmination of God's love for us, that what happened to Jesus will also someday happen to us. Easter is more than a time of new hope. Easter, Jesus' resurrection, is the epidemy and fulfillment of ALL our hopes and desires. What we work for so hard on this earth for ourselves and our families - security, comfort, harmony, understanding - is what the resurrection of Jesus from the dead promises for us who trust in his word - the gift of perfect joy, perfect harmony, perfect love, being in perfect unity with God who is perfect joy, perfect peace, perfect love. Easter is the ultimate expression of New Life - the heavenly breaking of the earthly cycle which can never satisfy. Easter is the sweetness that never fades from the tip of the tongue, through Easter, Jesus' resurrection, we are offered the fulfillment of every longing, the final realization of how much we are loved!

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As the Season of Lent is on our doorstep, we might want to take a few moments to consider how this special time in the life of the church will touch us and, hopefully, change us. Lent is a time when we make certain sacrifices, not just for the sake of doing something difficult, but that through these actions we might grow in the realization of how much we are loved in the act of Christ's suffering and death, and through this realization that we might have a larger, more loving heart. All of us, through our own many experiences, know that any change is not easy and yet we also know there are key instances in life when even a small change can make a big difference. Taking the stairs instead riding the elevator, or getting even an extra half hour of sleep every night are just two examples of how a small change in our routine can have very positive health benefits.

We've made a small adjustment in our schedule here at St. Rose which we hope will bring positive spiritual benefits. Starting with the beginning of Lent (see the special schedule for Ash Wednesday), Thursday 2 March, the church of St. Rose of Lima now will be offering a 7:30am weekday Mass aimed especially for those in the area who in the past would've liked to have started their day with Mass and Holy Communion, but were unable to do so because the 8am Mass would not have allowed them sufficient time to drive to work.

Father Greg, Father Collins and I know that you're out there in Massapequa, Seaford and North Massapequa, and we know that many of you would benefit by this change. We know that especially during Lent many people would love to attend Mass as a part of their Lenten journey and now we've taken a step to help you begin your day with our Lord.

As an added benefit to this time change for our first Mass of the day, we will also offer a "Holy Hour" every Thursday immediately following the 7:30am Mass until the beginning of the 9am Mass. Whether individuals are able to remain in quiet adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for five minutes, ten minutes or the entire time, we intend to expand this opportunity to additional days in the future.

In a recent visit to Our Lady of the Hamptons Regional Catholic School, our new bishop, Bishop John Barres reminded the students that "Catholic Schools are critical to our future". I would like to build on that thought by saying that Catholic Family Life is critical to our future. Parents can provide a profound influence on their children when they are seen making that extra effort even one morning a week to spend time with Our Lord. And what an equally profound witness to the whole congregation it would be for the moms or dads who drop their children off at our school to come early for Mass, with their children. A recent news article claimed that age 13 is the typical age when a young adult starts to drift away from the practice of their Catholic Faith. So it is more necessary than ever to provide a platform and a reason for persons of every age to consciously and personally live their Catholic Faith.

Young catholic families, wherever they send their children to school, are indeed critical to our future. Without realizing it, young catholic families bring zest and vitality to parish life which is needed and necessary to renew the spark in older parishioners whose children are grown, married and have moved away. May this Lent be that conscious time for all our Young Catholic Families to know that in seeking renewal for themselves they also renew and strengthen the parish.

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Well, 2016 is gone, finished, caput and we're a few days into the brand new year of 2017. What will you do with this New Year? Will the turning of a calendar page really make any difference in your life? Will 2017 be any type of turning point or will the glamour of the possibilities of delving into this new year be like having a new toy that loses its shine and we tire of all too soon?

The new year is a time for resolutions in which one or two distinct possibilities occur all too quickly. First, those noble promises we make to ourselves fall by the wayside OR second, they become a new part of our lives because they were important enough to us to make a new part of our routine.

That is the key point; whatever we intent it truly must have importance to us. It cannot just be a nice thing, or something that will make us healthier or lighter or look younger. Our resolutions whether they be physical or spiritual need to be LIFE CHANGING, LIFE IMPACTING to make us stick with them. Change of any kind relies on consistency and a strong inner will or determination and so we may think that the changes, the improvements we'd like to make are far too difficult. And that may be our first mistake, trying to do a personal makeover all alone. St. Paul, however reminds us that, "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me".

We are reminded in many different scripture passages, but especially in many of the psalms NOT to rely on our own power or our own strength, nor to depend on other people, even kings and princes to come too our aid. To do so can bring us extreme disappointment. Instead, in attempting to make changes in our lives we are to cooperate with God's strength. "God is for us our refuge and our strength, a stronghold in time of need" (Ps. 46).

We often think of God as being a defender and shield against outside enemies who wish to harm us in some way. And yet, we know that we ourselves can be our own worst enemies with some of the decisions we make or perhaps not kicking it into gear when we know we need to take some kind of action. We forget that there are times and situations, especially when trying to initiate some sort of change in ourselves, when praying for ourselves is the very best action we can take.

In whatever words we choose to use, we should believe that God desires that we turn to him in prayer. The oft quoted phrase, 'God helps those who help themselves', is not found in scripture. Rather we are reminded that God helps those who CANNOT help themselves. We rely on God's grace, God's great compassion to aid us (not to do it for us) in our weakness. We know that God does not wish our death but rather our true conversion of heart. For if God did not spare His Only Son, but gave Him up (to death) to benefit us all (Romans 8:31), will God ignore the prayer of one who truly wishes to improve themselves? GOD DESIRES that we turn to Him, in prayer, not just for dangers that threaten us, but whenever inner temptation threatens to overcome our better desires.

What will you do with this new year? How about turning more often to God?

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Winter 2016: As we enter this busy time of year, we can sometimes take on the characteristics of that character we know (and even love) as "The Grinch". I don't know of anybody who isn't familiar with the story, especially as there have been a couple of TV and movie versions of "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" (the original is my favorite!) For all of us, this writer included, the joy of the Advent season can get shrunken by the list of things that we feel that we must do. We may even get that feeling of self-pity that we're the only one in the family who is saddled with all in the preparations for Christmas morning. We have our lists, we have a certain number of days, and things don't always turn out as we've scheduled and planned (in fact our original plans and time lines are generally unrealistic). From personal experience, one that I believe we've all shared, we can become cranky, grumpy and most Grinch-like when the days dwindle and the to-do list hasn't gotten any shorter, and in fact has grown longer.

And that's when we can turn into the Grinch who steals Christmas. We steal the joy of the Christmas Season from others by sulking, because we may have been inconvenienced and by allowing these setbacks to get under our skin. We steal the joy of the Christmas Season from those whom we love by refusing to enter into their joy. And in succumbing to these very real frustrations, in reality we are stealing the joy of the Christmas celebration from OURSELVES. We are keeping ourselves from entering into the most wonderful time of the year; the celebration of God become man. Oh yes, we will snap out of it eventually, yet think of all the time and emotion we've wasted by forgetting that all that we do, we do for Jesus himself and for all our families and friends whom we love. We all can remember at least one story told about the Christmas feast which teaches the lesson that it isn't all the lights and goodies and tinsel that surrounds Christmas which makes us happy, but the people we gather with in the name of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

The experience of these next four weeks of literally having too much on our plate is a good lesson for the New Year of 2017. There will always be moments of frustration, annoyance and anger. There will always be situations that threaten

to become obstacles and overwhelm us. There will always be those individuals who rub us the wrong way. We need only remember WHY we run ourselves ragged over these next four weeks. In pausing for that extra moment in thought, we need to see the irony that when we are preparing to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace that so many of us are lacking a peaceful spirit. There are no magical answers or formulas; but reminding ourselves to take a breath and pray certainly helps. When can say that 'Jesus is the reason for the Season' (Thank you Knights of Columbus for that pithy summary), we can also realize that Jesus is the reason for every season, every week, every day. When we make Jesus the priority in our lives then (to steal another Christmas song line) there will be nothing that brings dismay. May the Spirit of joy that the celebration of the birth of Jesus brings, guide you throughout the year of 2017.

Fall 2016: The summer is winding down. And as wonderful as the warmer weather, trips to the beach and vacation time can be, we come to appreciate those days of fun and relaxation all the more because they are so ephemeral. We need some down time, as for most people the greatest majority of our attention and our time is focused on our jobs, our classes.

Each September in a sense, therefore, is the beginning of a new year. Certainly our school children and their teachers recognize this. After being refreshed by the summer vacation, they begin again with new challenges. This may not really be the case at our jobs, but in a sense, after having some time off in the summer, I think it important that we attempt to make our return to the ordinary routine of work 'something new' for ourselves.

We can return with a new attitude of generosity or patience. We can resolve not to allow ourselves to be so consumed by the needs of the workplace, that the relationships within our families suffer. We can make the resolution to be more understanding with our superiors at work, or to be more open to the needs of those who work for us. We can promise ourselves that we will 'take Jesus to work with us' and quietly turn to Him in moments of tension or when some of those old or constant annoyances pop up.

Even though the autumn is a time when leaves start falling, signaling the approach of winter, it is also a beautiful season when those same leaves do first change their color and provide a magnificent display of natural beauty. If we look at autumn more as a 'new year' for us and our children and grandchildren rather than just a new season, it can signal for us a time to change any of the 'bad habits' that we may have developed over the summer.

Summer, understandably, provides a relaxation in our routine. Now that families are getting back to their 'school year routine', this may be a perfect time to put a few 'new wrinkles' in that routine at the very start. One question can be, "What are the greatest priorities in my life?" Another can be, "What priority do I set in my relationship with Jesus Christ?" We need to admit to ourselves how far up or how far down on the list He is. In a world full of tension, full of violence, full of hatred, full of an uncertainty of where we are going, we may lose heart. Yet the gospels and Pope Francis continually urge us to Jesus. And Jesus himself is always reminding his followers, "Do not be afraid". "Have faith in God and have faith in me."

We can become quite busy this September with all sorts of new activities and demands. It is OK to be busy, to engage in those things that bring us joy or a challenge or pleasure. Let us also include God in our busyness.

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It is a time of horror, a time of sorrow – all of our own making. We are living in the midst of an American tragedy, as divisive and heartbreaking as the American Civil War which pitted brother against brother. As Americans, we are all brothers and sisters in One Nation, under God, yet in recent days both that sense of fraternity and the presence of God seem so very far away.

Even in you've been away on vacation over the last two weeks, I'm fairly confident that you're aware of the police shootings of black citizens in New Orleans and in Minnesota. In past months, we have suffered the same sad news in our

own New York City. Incidents of police brutality have been reported all over the country, most prominently in Baltimore and St. Louis.

In the city of Dallas, Texas five police officers were shot down and killed and another seven wounded by a sniper who, according to reports was upset about these most recent police shootings of innocent black citizens who were victims of gross police over reactions. It is understandable that at some point something snaps in any human psyche, but it is still unacceptable that these men also became victims of hatred, murdered in place of those who are guilty of violent racism. And we as a country ask, "Why is this happening? What's going on? How do we make this insanity stop?"

We should be outraged and frightened by these recent events. We should be outraged and frightened by the reaction of certain people toward them. We should also know that what we read about and watch did not spring out of thin air, but they are the inevitable result of a larger, more frightening chain of our history. The dismissal of the life of faith by so many who claim the name "Christian", "Jew", "Muslim" is partly to blame. Fear (of many things) is certainly the other part of the equation, for fear does breed violent reaction; thinking (wrongly) to protect ourselves from what scares us; and we live in scary times.

Is it any surprise that with the breakdown of family life, traditional moral and ethical values, the down turn of involvement in spiritual and religious life within our churches and places of worship that we are facing this crisis on our streets? Is it any surprise as seen by every recent poll, that as people diminish their relation with God that hatred, racism and violence increase? Is it any surprise that when we take prayer out of our schools and places of public assembly that there is such a great loss in our moral compass?

There are many contributing factors as to why we are experiencing our present dilemma. Some claim that formal religion does little good and comes with its own prejudices. There may be a grain of truth to that statement, yet I recoil from the thought of what our lives would be like without the gift of knowledge of God's presence in our hearts which restrains so many of our more savage impulses.

Therefore, though we may not be able to turn back the clock, we need to bring a sense of sinfulness and the need for conversion to our country. We need to once again make clear and teach our children – and remind one another - that there are certain consequences (no matter who you are) for certain actions. Call me naïve, but it is clear that the more we push God away from our life, the more we will experience sorrow and strife. Fear of the Lord is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. We fear God's punishment for our sins, but more importantly we fear separating ourselves from God's love, as GOD IS LOVE. The Great Commandment is Love God, Love your Neighbor. If we can only start there, there would be no need to fear either here or above.

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Our hearts and prayers go out to the victims of the murderous attack in Orlando. We grieve for them and with their families. We are both sorrowful and appalled at the hatred behind this act of terrorism and we condemn this and all actions committed to cause pain and suffering. May the prayer of St. Francis be our guide. In response to hatred, may we sow love. In return for injury, may we bring healing. In place of fear, may we bring comfort and solace. Today as always, we try to follow in Jesus' footsteps in comforting the victims while in some way calling upon divine intervention, to love our enemies and pray for our persecutors. With each passing day we see more strongly the need for both a personal and communal practice of Mercy. In this Extraordinary Year of Mercy, declared by Pope Francis, daily events remind each of us of the mercies experienced in our own lives and the need to extend mercy. What is mercy? Many people can give numerous definitions of what mercy is, but perhaps the best and simplest way to speak of this great virtue is in three words – any undeserved gift.

The gift of Mercy can be a dramatic gift such as sparing the life of someone whose actions deserve death. The gift of Mercy can be the forgiving of a loan or debt that would be difficult or even impossible to repay. Being merciful may be the keeping of a person's secret that would harm them, and them alone, if revealed. In the gospels, the mercy of God is

in the forgiveness of sins. In the gospels, Jesus shows another side of divine mercy by healing or curing various illnesses and maladies that could not be improved by the medical ability of his time.

In our day to day routines, we may feel that it is difficult to see mercy in our world. We may feel that it is even more difficult to extend mercy knowing how people take undue advantage of goodness. This is where the practical definition of Mercy takes shape as one of the fruits of Charity. It is a practice of loving mercy for the person who has two coats to give a person who is suffering from the cold.

Yet the practice of Mercy does not have to be lived in the intensity of St. Martin of Tours, who cut the cloak he was wearing in half to give to a beggar who was shivering by the city gates. We can practice the virtue of Mercy through any charitable action when we come to the aid of a person in spiritual or bodily need. Indeed, simply by consciously and actively living the words of the Our Father ...forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us... is a beautiful way to enter into this Jubilee Year of Mercy by both the action of the bestowal of mercy and the need of receiving God's mercy each day.