

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A

Saint Margaret Parish, Bel Air
September 25, 2011 All Masses

A Vision for the Future

There is a wonderful story from one of our Native American tribes.

This tribe was encamped at the base of a mountain and its leader was dying. The old chief summoned his three sons and said, *"I am dying and one of you must succeed me as the head of the tribe.*

"I want each of you to climb our holy mountain and bring back something beautiful. The one whose gift is the most outstanding will succeed me."

After several days the sons returned. The first brought his father a flower which grew near the summit and was rare and beautiful.

The second son brought his father a stone which was colorful, smooth and polished by the rains and winds. The third son's hands were empty.

He said, *"Father, I have brought nothing back to show you. As I stood on top of the holy mountain, I saw that on the other side was a beautiful land filled with green pastures and a crystal lake.*

"Now I have a vision of where our tribe could go for a better life. I was so overwhelmed by this vision that I could not bring anything back."

The father, the old chief, replied, *"You shall be our tribe's new leader. You have brought back the most precious thing of all – the gift of a vision for a better future."*

The Present

That story really speaks to me and I hope to all of us today.

I think that we, collectively as a parish, are in the position of that third son. We have and we do much good, but we also have a vision for a better future.

Right now, for example, we have strong education and faith formation programs, with about 1,500 children and youth in them. This summer, we sent two of our youth to the week-long High-Li program – an Archdiocesan program for leadership development for youth.

We have 1,600 parishioners screened and approved to volunteer in a wide variety of ways – from assisting at the Homeless Shelter to music and other liturgical ministries. So, presently, we have and do so many good things.

The Future

And yet, we also have a vision for the future.

We have a vision for fulfilling our mission even better. We envision our school very soon being awarded the status of Blue Ribbon School.

We envision having more of our youth engaged in ministries – as Eucharistic Ministers or in the prison outreach ministry and other opportunities. We envision an effective outreach to our young adults, especially ages 18 to 30.

We envision an outreach to the entire Bel Air community – inviting all to join us for worship and assuring everyone that they are wanted and welcome. These are some examples of our vision for the future as a large and excellent parish.

Offertory Giving

One necessary way for all of this to happen is through our offertory giving.

Your generosity has been wonderful and has enabled so much good to be done. Today, as I do every year at this time, I am asking you to renew your financial giving to the parish.

Our budget for this ministry year or fiscal year that began on July 1 is balanced. There are comments on this in my bulletin columns today and again next week.

The budget is virtually flat – the same bottom line as last year. I am sending each parish family a letter this week and making one request.

I am asking those of us who can to increase our giving to the offertory by 3%. So, if we are giving \$10 a week, begin now to give \$10.30 a week.

If we are giving \$50 a week, begin now to give \$51.50 a week. Why a 3% increase?

The parishioners on the Development Committee and Finance Committee and I think that this request is wise because some of us this year will not be able to increase our giving. And some of us, because of personal circumstance, will have to decrease our giving.

So, if those of us who can will increase our giving by 3%, we will be fine. We will be able to provide all budgeted programs and services and operate in balance.

That is my request, put very simply. I ask you to complete the Commitment Card that you will receive with my letter, bring it to Mass next weekend and place it in the collection basket or return it in some other way.

Conclusion

I want to conclude by recalling the beautiful words of Saint Paul to one of the early Church communities in today's second reading.

Imagine Paul speaking to us. *“Complete my joy complete by being of the same mind, united in heart, thinking one thing.*

“Humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for your own interests, but also for those of others. Have in you the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus.”

What a wonderful exhortation from Paul! What a wonderful basis for our participation and our giving to the spiritual mission of our parish.