



Homily for
THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD
2/3 January, 2016

Fr. Dwayne's homily follows....

I. On December 8, Pope Francis inaugurated a “Holy Year of Mercy” by opening the Holy Door at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. Since then, a “Holy Door” has been opened in the other basilicas in Rome, as well as in every diocese in the world. Walking through a Holy Door is part of our devotion as we observe the meaning of this Year of Mercy: this Holy Year of Mercy calls us to experience in a “visceral way” the meaning of God’s Mercy. In other words, Pope Francis wants us to feel God’s Mercy in our gut – in the depths of our being. Pope Francis writes, “In short, the mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality with which he reveals his love as that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child.” (Misericordiae Vultus, no. 6)

As we move through the liturgy during this Holy Year, I am certain there will be many times we will notice God’s mercy evident in the scripture readings and in various feasts of the year. We will realize in a fuller way....God’s Mercy is everywhere! Lent – Easter – the parables Jesus will tell us – will all reveal God’s

mercy.

Likewise, this Solemnity of the Epiphany is another step in God's revelation of his mercy. No longer was the mystery of God revealed only to the Jews, but this story of the magi from the east visiting the newborn Jesus teaches that God's salvation is for all people: Jew and Gentile alike. That message of salvation has continued to this every day: proclaimed to every nation, to every people, alive in the Church today and brought to every parish and parishioner throughout the world.

The Epiphany gives us an opportunity to reflect upon how we are doing, how we are making the gospel message come to life among us. With that in mind, I would to offer a kind of "State of Parish" message today...reflecting upon where we have been and where we might go in the coming year. I will review only some of the highlights of ministry at Holy Spirit Parish.

II. To a great degree our **Financial** position supports parish ministry.

- our financial position continues to grow stronger and we need to continue working on that.
- last fiscal year (ending June 30) we had an approximate \$100,000 deficit
- in order to improve our financial position we continue to cut expenses wherever we find them and at the same time we need to increase contributions
- with that in mind we set a goal in our fall renewal of treasure to increase adult income by \$100,000

- we are pleased that parishioners have committed to increase their contributions for this fiscal year by \$73,400. This will make a significant difference in our efforts to balance the budget.
- Moving forward we have established a sub-committee of the Finance Council to develop a Planned Giving Program. We have been collecting resources and will be developing this program in the coming year. Having a well thought-out Planned Giving Program will be critical for helping Holy Spirit Parish to realize financial stability.
- Meanwhile, this year we have finished the long awaited elevator at Holy Ghost church. We will need to take out a small loan in order to pay final bills, but with pledges to yet be collected, and a little more fund raising, we should be able to pay back the loan in a relatively short amount of time.
- with the help of the Dubuque Racing Association and donors, we were able to replace the roof on the parish office building at Sacred Heart
- and we reduce expenses with the assistance of many parishioners who provide support financially for special projects – like the removal of the dying trees at Holy Trinity or their labor with care of each of our three campuses or assisting with secretarial help.

With all of us working together, we will be able to significantly strength our financial and material resources.

In the area of **Faith Formation:** many exciting things are happening...

- with the fiscal year which ended in June, we had 161 students enrolled in Catholic school and 145 students enrolled in our religious education program

- we continue to reach out to families who are not participating in any faith formation for their children and invite their participation
- our RCIA has grown this year: we have 11 adults participating in the process with the goals of either being baptized, received into the Church or complete the sacraments of the Eucharist and Confirmation
- this past year we had 18 weddings, 35 confirmations of both youth and adults and 35 baptisms
- this year we initiated Life Teen for our high school students: this has really taken off and engages over 30 youth each Wednesday evening.

We continue to grow our **liturgical** experience....

- our liturgies are strong prayerful experiences in which we have many dedicated liturgical ministers who seek to be well prepared for their liturgical role
- this past year we had an in-service for all of our ushers and greeters. Hospitality is a key virtue in building evangelization. We have sought to improve hospitality with this in-service and with a growing awareness of each parishioner on the importance of hospitality.

Strategic Planning

- the parish Strategic Plan developed in 2010/2011 has pretty much run its course and so in the spring the Pastoral Council initiated the process of updating the Strategic Plan
- the structure of this new plan was set in place in late spring and then throughout the summer months several sub-committees worked on sections of the plan
- in these winter months we are fine tuning the plan and will be finalizing it in coming month

- the goal is for this plan to serve the parish for the next five years

Of major import for each of us this year is the **Holy Year of Mercy** inaugurated by Pope Francis. This has huge potential for invigorating the Church worldwide as well as in each local parish.

- throughout this year we are invited to reflect upon the concept of Mercy, God's Mercy towards us, and how that impacts our spirituality
- and then we are challenged to show that same mercy to others
- the major ways in which we can do that is by practicing the works of mercy
- each parish has been asked to adopt one of the corporal works of mercy as their own special focus. At the October meeting, the Pastoral Council decided to adopt "to bury the dead" as our parish corporal work of mercy. We will be developing ways in which we can do that.
- the Dubuque deanery has proposed parishes in the deanery participate in a deanery wide corporal work of mercy. Our Pastoral Council decided to join this effort. The deanery wide project will be to "shelter the homeless." We will be participating in a deanery project to work with Habitat for Humanity in building a new house.
- and then there are seven weeks throughout the year dedicated to each of the seven corporal works of mercy. We will have a special parish project for each. The first one is January 17: to give drink to the thirsty. Information on this will be in next Sunday's bulletin and the bulletin of January 17. Our focus for this week will be to provide baby formula which will be distributed by various social service agencies

III. And since this is the beginning of a new year, I would like to make a **prediction!**

And that prediction is: Pope Francis will amaze in several ways this year. As you know, he is working hard to reform the world-wide Church with a special emphasis on including the poor, on reaching out to the peripheries. I predict he will continue to take these new initiatives which will effect not only the world-wide Church, but also each of us in the local parish.

I encourage you to follow news of the Pope – read his homilies and messages online at the Vatican website or other sources in the media. Reflect upon his message and ministry to the Church.

IV. The Magi from the east were following a star – a star whose light began to shine from the earliest days – from Abraham and Sarah to the prophet Isaiah who speaks of a caravan, a procession of people seeking to know the love and mercy of God. In every age, God’s people are enlightened by that star and find God’s presence.

May that procession continue among us in this new year as we labor in the Lord’s vineyard discovering God’s mercy for ourselves and sharing it with all those we encounter.

Fr. Kyle’s homily follows....

Today we celebrate Epiphany, when the Magi, guided by a star visit the child Jesus. Not unlike the Magi, there are Christ-seekers all throughout the world today. As a parish, we strive to be that shining star, in the sometimes dark world of suffering and evil in our midst so that others may find the light of Christ and know the true joy and happiness which dispels the darkness of

our lives. As members here at Holy Spirit Parish, we are all like little stars that might guide others to Jesus. We shine with the light of Christ to dispel the darkness in the life of others.

The Epiphany gives us an opportunity to reflect upon how we are doing, how we are making the light of Christ shine in our parish, our community, and our world? With that in mind, I would like to offer a kind of “State of Parish” message today...reflecting upon where we have been and where we might go in the coming year. I will review only some of the highlights of ministry at Holy Spirit Parish.

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I have only been here at this parish for about a year and a half but I can say that I have come to love Holy Spirit Parish. In part because of the great things we have going on here but because I have encountered Jesus through all of you here at Holy Spirit Parish. To encounter Christ through the love and service of all of you has brought me great joy and I greatly desire others to encounter Christ through all of you and your work and support here at Holy Spirit.

As the star guided the Magi to Christ, so too do we guide others to Christ by the light of our lives. Please continue to share your love and support so that Holy Spirit may be that shining star guiding others to an encounter with Jesus Christ.