

State of the Parish Report

November 15-16, 2008

The gospel parable we just heard was directed toward Jesus' disciples – that means, towards us. It talks about our mission, and that's what I want to talk about as the Pastoral Council and I give the annual *State of the Parish* report. Each of us has a mission from God – actually, several missions. The first of them is individual – for many of you, to be a spouse and perhaps a parent. God may also have sent you – given you a mission – which you express through the work you do, whether for pay or as a volunteer in the community or parish. And we also have a mission together, and that's my focus today. God put us here, together, in Our Lady of Grace, for a purpose. And from the Gospel parable it's clear that God expects us to take what He's given us and do some good with it.

Part of what I have to tell you has to do with money – but it's not primarily about the money. Remember one thing: **Money equals mission.** And our mission is in trouble because the money is short. You'll see in the financial report summary in today's *Bulletin* that we needed to spend about \$44,000 more than we took in this past year in order to accomplish our work. That's not good, and it can't go on. You've seen in the *Bulletin* almost every week that our Sunday collection has been under goal; less money, less for mission. We've cut staff and overhead every year since I arrived, but there's nothing left to cut now but services. From now on, not enough money will clearly mean, less mission. So I'm asking you to do three things, one easy and two hard:

- First: Read my commentary on the financial report that's in the *Bulletin*, even if you ignore the report itself (that's easy).
- Second: take to heart today's Gospel – it's addressed to disciples, which means to you and me; the Gospel says we can succeed, but we can also fail in our mission. That hard to accept, but true.
- Third: Ask yourself, in the light of this Gospel, "Am I likely to hear a 'Well done!' from Christ for how I've used what God has entrusted to me?" That's very hard to think about – but each of us needs to.

I'll have more to say in a moment; now I'd like to invite (Name), a member of our Pastoral Council, to say some things about how we've done in fulfilling our shared mission this past year:

Begin Council Member's Text

My name is _____ and I am a member of Our Lady of Grace Parish Council.

Wow! Fr. Vin sure had some disappointing financial news for us today. I'll bet some of you are thinking. "Uh Oh" they're going to ask for more money now". Well not yet though that is something we will all have to pray over and respond to, as we are able.

Today, I'm here to remind you that each and every one of you sitting in these pews is the best resource that Our Lady of Grace has. Throughout the years of this parish, OLOG has never been blessed with abundant financial resources. We have struggled before, but each time, the people of the parish have stepped up and worked together to make this parish successful.

I'm here to encourage each of you to be an active participant in the spiritual community of OLOG. I hope that you have noticed the banner we placed in the lobby and brought to the front of the altar at this mass. The banner represents the "priorities" that the Parish Council and the staff have developed over the past year.

These priorities began to emerge when the Council hosted listening sessions last year and surveyed the parish members about worship activities that are important to each of us. Of course, the Eucharist & the Sacraments are at the center of our worship and at the center of the banner. The rays of light that shine from the center represent the priorities the parish has identified as important to developing and sharing our faith. Everything else flows from this altar.

Your suggestions have led the Council and staff to develop our other priorities. We want OLOG to be an Embracing Community. We want this community to engage our youth to become lifetime disciples of Jesus. We choose to have ongoing faith formation, prayer groups and opportunities to serve. These priorities make up the spokes of the banner.

I also hope you have noticed some new programs that have recently been started to fulfill these priorities.

We began a wonderful Confirmation program involving the youth and their families, not only instructing them in their faith, but engaging them in the hands-on work of service to others. (I hope you noticed the pictures & article in the Long Island Catholic a few weeks ago).

Again in response to your requests, as part of our Lenten mission, we began a scripture study program that was very successful. We now have an ongoing Women's bible study program on Friday Night and a "Scripture from Scratch" program that meets several times a week.

The advisory board has brought back our Youth ministry that will focus on the spiritual and social needs of our youth and include them in all aspects of our parish life.

In addition to these new initiatives, let's not forget the wonderful activities this parish has done well for a long time.

We have many opportunities for prayer and some prayer groups are active. If you come on a Monday for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, you can experience a moment of deep peace in a much too hectic world.

Our children's ministry at the 10:30am Mass, Kids of the Kingdom, Angel Care, and Vacation Bible School are some of them for children.

Widows & widowers groups, Nursing Home services, Knights of Columbus, and Parish Outreach are only a few of the adult programs we have.

We need to celebrate these wonderful efforts by so many of our parishioners over the years and reach out to each of you to ask for your help and participation to ensure our future success.

You each have God-given gifts to serve in some way in this parish. No gift is too small or too unnecessary. They are all important. (Remember the Little drummer Boy who played his drum for the baby in the manger because that was all he had to give).

Please take a few moments after mass to check out these priorities on the banner and in the *Bulletin*. I hope that you will want to be part of energizing our efforts and participating in our parish story. Look in the bulletin for a spotlight on activities and know that you will be welcomed because despite OLOG and this country's current financial difficulties, the one

“currency” that cannot be de-valued is the gifts that we were all given by God and can bring to the parish.

Please see me and other Council members in the lobby after Mass today or another day if you wish to get some information.

Thank you

End Council Member’s Text

Are we, together, what today’s Gospel calls “useless servants”? I don’t think so. There are too many people in our parish who are dedicated and talented disciples who are incredibly generous – that’s the only way that what you’ve just heard about gets done. But each of us has to ask, Am I among the servants who have multiplied what the Lord has given, and given back generously? What’s a fair standard for me?

As I close, I want to return to our mission. After his resurrection Jesus sends his disciples out with the words, “Go and make disciples...” That’s the heart of our common mission here. Our Lady of Grace is commanded by God to make disciples: to help people to know God, love God, and follow God’s way. You’ve heard some things about how we do that, and you probably know of some more that we didn’t have time to mention today. When you walk out of church today, what I want you to remember is that this report wasn’t about money – it was about obedience to the Lord, and how we fulfill our mission together. So:

- Take a *Bulletin* and read at least my commentary on the financial report;
- Take the Gospel of the talents to heart: “Well done, good and faithful servant!” - or, “Take this useless servant out of here!”
- Ask, what will it take for me to hear a “Well done” from the Lord? Ask it about how you spend the time God has given you on earth. Ask it about how you use your talents and skills. Ask it especially about how you use your money, and about your level of financial support for our parish’s mission. Figure out what percentage of your income you give back to God’s work here in our parish and ask whether that’s a right amount to sustain our mission. Make a plan to give back to God to sustain Christ’s work, and begin – next weekend – to follow it.

From the time I arrived here three years ago I said I would be straightforward with you – and I am now. The news today about our fidelity to our mission is mixed. We have great possibilities, even in a difficult time in our country. But the parish and its works can’t be sustained by the gifts of only some of our members. God put each of us here to do what we can, so that we can each hear that “Well done!” from Jesus Christ that, deep in our hearts, we so long for.

May God continue to bless you.