

St. Anne Parish Report—Part 3

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Over the past two weeks we have been hearing about our parish's financial situation. The first week Craig Parietti, chair of the Finance Council gave a financial report and analysis; last week Pastoral Council chair Carmen Suazo talked about how the weak financial situation is impacting our community. If you missed either of these presentations, there are printed materials available at the church doors. I encourage you to read them.

Today I will take a few minutes to talk about our parish's future. I begin with a Scripture.

After this Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples...When Jesus saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, "Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?" ... One of his disciples said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people recline." ... So they reclined, about five thousand in number.

Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining... When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, "Gather the fragments left over"... They filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments. (John 6:2-13)

I share this reading from the Gospel of John because I think it speaks to our parish's situation. Like those first disciples, we are gathered around the Lord, we are in need, and we see even greater need around us.

In the Gospel, the disciples are underwhelmed by how little they have—five loaves and two fish. They seem to be ready to give up in despair. But Jesus does something quite surprising. He accepts their meager offering and, rather than *complaining* about how little they have, he gives *thanks*. He thanks God for the fact that they have five loaves among five thousand people.

When the disciples begin to distribute what little they have, something happens; the Gospel doesn't explain exactly what. Perhaps there was some phenomenal event where the loaves began to multiply themselves. Or—maybe something else occurred. Perhaps when the people saw the way that Jesus was grateful, and thankful, and hopeful, something changed in them. Maybe what they felt led them to reach into their bags and take the loaves they had brought with them that morning—that they had earlier kept back for themselves—and place them in the baskets as they were being passed around. Perhaps they took only what they truly needed, and gave the rest for the others who did not have enough. In the end, everyone was fed, and there were twelve baskets left over.

Either way—it was a miracle. In fact, I believe it would be an even bigger miracle to get people to share their food with others than it would be to make loaves and fish suddenly appear.

We need a miracle at St. Anne's. Not so much a miracle of multiplying loaves and fish—or even money (though that would help!) What is needed is a miracle of a change in attitude—of looking not at how little we have and being disappointed and frustrated, but rather of looking at what we have, and being *grateful*.

Changing our attitudes can be difficult. But the gospel story offers us an example. The apostles focused on how little they had and were negative; Jesus, on the other hand, looked at the five loaves and was grateful—he gave thanks to God for what they had. And he calls us to do the same—to be *grateful* rather than *negative*—to realize that God desires to bless what we have and to do much, much more.

And there is much that God can do with St. Anne Parish. In fact, what many people see as problems with our present situation are the five loaves and two fish that God can use to bring abundance to our future.

St. Anne Parish has changed. The demographics of the Queen Anne neighborhood have changed—and will continue to change. But what can God do with this? One possibility is for us to become a more diverse and inclusive community. We can still honor our past, but learn to embrace new,

creative, dynamic ideas about being a parish. We can learn to truly respect different perspectives and opinions, without it leading to division. That's a gift that God can bring forth from the changes we see on Queen Anne Hill—if we let him.

St. Anne doesn't have a priest pastor. This is a reality of the church today: 26 other parishes in our Archdiocese are in the same situation. But what can God do with this? One possibility is to help us embrace our role as lay people in the church, to provide leadership, to accept responsibility, to work together in spite of our differences. We can learn that God has given the members of this parish the gifts, the vision, the faith that is needed to make this community a vibrant one. That's a gift that God could bring forth from not having a priest pastor—if we let him.

Personally I see would like to see St. Anne Parish become a community that really makes a difference in the lives of its parishioners. I would like to see our Masses full of people who actively sing and pray and make the liturgies meaningful and dynamic...where the vibrant community attracts newcomers...where people are involved in bigger social issues facing our neighborhood and our world, and are organizing to do something about them...where we have programs that actively engage teens and young adults and single people and young families...where seniors are enthusiastically sharing their gifts and wisdom...

Some of this is already happening; much more is possible. But in order for that to happen, we need that miracle I was talking about. We need to change our attitude from negativity to gratitude. We need to stop looking at what we don't have, or what we wish were different, or what we think is wrong, and instead be grateful for what God has given us. We need to be generous with what we have been given, allowing God to bless it, multiply it, and use it to feed the multitudes.

In three months we begin our second century as St. Anne Parish. This will be a unique opportunity to celebrate our past, and to look to our future. How wonderful it would be to start our second hundred years as a parish in a positive, dynamic way.

And so, to move in that direction, I am asking all of us to do three things:

1. First, I ask each one of us to make a commitment to be *grateful*, to be *positive* about what God has given our community. Let's stop looking at the glass as half empty. Let's stop the negativity. Instead, thank God for the loaves and fish that we have. It may not be what you personally want; it may not be as much as you want. But let's each bring to the Lord what we do have. Let's allow our hearts to be blessed so we can be generous.
2. Secondly, we need to address the parish financial situation. If you are behind in your financial support of the parish, please do everything you can to make it up. This will help us reduce the \$30,000 deficit we are facing this fiscal year. Some of you have already done this; thank you.
3. And lastly, if there is any way that you can go beyond what you have pledged, as some have already done, please do. If you can make a one-time gift of \$1000, this would be the time to do so. If you can afford \$500 or \$100, this would help us move beyond the bare-bones budget and recover some of what had to be cut.

At every Eucharist we come together—as the apostles did in the Gospel story—to bring to God what we have. We bring our gifts for God to bless—simple gifts of bread and wine. What we receive back from God is infinitely more—the gift of his presence, the Body and Blood of Christ. May we take this lesson from this Mass today into our hearts and lives. What we offer with grateful hearts, God blesses and uses to do remarkable things.

God has a great vision for St. Anne Parish in the months and years ahead. Let's address the need our parish is facing with faith in one another and faith in God's incredible generosity.

