

Companions on the Journey

December 5, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

As many of you know for the past seven or eight years we have had a wonderful celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadeloupe here at Saint Anthony's. Our parishioners of Mexican descent (and other of Hispanic and native origin) take responsibility for the planning and the decorating and the cooking and serving and cleaning up. The whole parish is grateful for this wonderful Mid-Advent feast day celebration. We are not always able to have the celebration on the actual feast day, December 12th. This year we will be celebrating next Saturday evening at the 5:15 Mass. Instead of our regular Music Ministry we will have the services of Mariachi Flores, a Mariachi band that has been here many times before. They are excellent.

I go into all this because I want you to know that the celebration will be entirely in Spanish. I will be the celebrant. I will be giving the homily in Spanish also. In the earliest days we tried to make the celebration a bi-lingual celebration. It was difficult for everyone including the celebrant. Several years back I made the decision, with the support of our Anglo and Mexican parishioners that the Mass should be in the vernacular of the parishioners from Mexico. And so it will this year also. Even in another language you are often able to catch most of what is going on but more importantly your presence sends a welcome gesture of inclusion and solidarity with those of other backgrounds and languages. Please know you are all welcome for this annual celebration.

Related to the above, you will remember the banner that has been on display over our Church doors for the past two months. The members of the Neo-Catechumenal Way have been coming here each Monday and Thursday evening for over two months. Two weekends ago the dozen or so parishioners who were able went on a Retreat at the Trinitarian Spirituality Center on Solly Avenue in the Northeast, next to Father Judge High School. It was a wonderful time and moving and meaningful. At the end of the Retreat each attendee, including the pastor was asked if they wanted to continue meeting and praying in this vein. Each answered in the affirmative.

One of the unique things about the Neo-Catechumenal Way (which was founded around 65 years ago in Spain and has received approval from Pope Benedict XVI and the Vatican to do what it is doing) is the way that they celebrate the Mass. Here at Saint Anthony's we have two Masses with music accompaniment. There is one Sunday Mass without music, or a Quiet Mass. We do this because there are parishioners who prefer each kind of celebration. In some parishes there is a Latin Mass on occasion. It is valid and lawful but in Latin. Next week we celebrate here in Spanish. In the Ukrainian tradition when you receive holy communion the manner in which you receive is different. Instead of a host there is a small cube of unleavened bread, consecrated and sitting in the Precious Blood. The priest distributing communion uses a small spoon to place one small cube in the mouth of the person going to Holy Communion. I remember the first time I experienced that, it took some getting used to. All of the above is Eucharist but the way the Mass is celebrated allows for a number of variations.

In the Neo-Catechumenal Way their custom is to have a round, newly-baked by a member of the Community. It is much more like bread than the hosts we are used to. It is much closer to what Jesus had available to him at the Last Supper. And that is the point. There was an effort to return to what actually transpired at the Last Supper when the Eucharist was instituted. As the celebrant, I break that bread into the number of pieces so that there is one piece for each person present. I go to each person as they are seated around the altar in a semi-circle. I say, "The Body of Christ." They say: "Amen." I place the piece of consecrated bread in their hands. They do not consume it right away. Instead they sit down, holding the host in their hands and they pray, speaking to the Lord, looking lovingly at the Lord, looking in adoration. Once all the consecrated bread has been distributed and everyone is seated, then they all consume the Body of Christ.

Afterwards the same procedure is followed in that the celebrant goes to each recipient and presents the chalice of Precious Blood. Each receives and is seated. In this celebration, the sign of peace is allowed to take place immediately after the Prayer of the Faithful before the Offertory. There are a few other features but these are the basics. So, on Saturday November 27th at 7:30 I celebrated Mass in our Mary Chapel (which has been slightly rearranged to move two rear pews up into the front of the Chapel to facilitate closeness to the altar. We will leave the chapel like this for a while and the Spanish Friday night Prayer Group will utilize this new format also.

I will be publishing a list of dates when we will have this additional Mass to the parish weekend Mass schedule. It will probably be a couple of times a month—at 7:30 on Saturday night. Anyone can attend. Everyone is welcome. But just a heads up, this celebration is a bit more meditative and there is some faith sharing which takes place. Thus the length of the Mass is longer. Think in terms of an hour and fifteen or twenty minutes. But if you want a more intimate experience of Mass this is something you may want to consider. Not all the time but some times. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask them. Know this, the Neo-Catechumenal Way Seminarists attend Saint Charles Seminary just like other young men studying for the priesthood do. There have already been some ordinations for Philadelphia. We are blessed to have these faithful men and women in our midst. Please welcome them if you see them. The core group here, of course, is composed entirely of our own parishioners.

Peace,

Msgr. McHenry