

WE ARE CALLED TO BE—IGNITED BY LOVE

Today I want to speak to you of the blessing that you are to me as Pastor and as parishioners of this wonderful parish under the patronage of Saint Anthony of Padua. I have been blessed to be here a long time and have come to know that there are a great many “Saint Anthony stories.” Stories about how so many of you came to be here and why you have stayed. Next weekend you will hear some of your fellow parishioners share their stories with you at the homily time.

My first point today is one of gratitude. You are the ones who make Saint Anthony’s the wonderful parish it is. You are the ones who come, who pray, who worship, who participate, who support and who speak up for who we are and what we are about here. Sometimes the role of the pastor is described as the orchestra leader whose task it is, not to play any of the instruments but, to assist each musician to play his or her best AND in harmony with those around them to make the most beautiful music possible. But the conductor does not do the playing. The conductor assists those who do. The beautiful result is the combined work of all involved.

You are the ones who hand on the Catholic faith, who make sure that your children learn the faith, who volunteer to serve at the altar and on various committees and commissions and councils for the parish You are the ones who do the heavy lifting, giving of your time and your energy and your considerable skills. You are the ones who share your food and collect food for the needy. You are the ones who provide casseroles for the homeless men at Saint John’s hospice. You are the ones who teach the classes, attend the retreats, go to daily Mass, or pray before the Blessed Sacrament. You are the ones who decorate the sanctuary or read the readings or sing in the choir or meet as fathers or grandfathers or various men’s groups and women’s groups. You are the ones who contribute in so many little ways to the success of our parish even to policing the church and the pews.

I, as pastor, have been on the receiving end of so much of your generous giving of yourself and your resources. It is a humbling experience sometimes to have to be the one to ask for help but that too is part of the pastor’s responsibility. I often ask you for help, for your time and your participation and support. I am

humbled by your generous response. I have come to believe that God is never outdone in generosity and his people are not either.

Last weekend was Priestly Vocation Sunday. All over the world priests were encouraged to speak of their lives as a priest. I want you to know how very important all of you are to me and how much love Our Lord has placed in my heart for you. I have told this story before. When I was a young priest one of the parishioners where I was assigned said to me one day that he thought I was a good priest—but that I would never be a great priest. I was hurt. I asked why he said that. He replied by saying that he truly believed that I gave myself to all the tasks and ministries of the priesthood and was a truly loving man but that I did not let the love of the people into my heart and soul. And that so long as it was just a one way street, me loving them, I would be a good priest but I would never be a great priest, not until I learned how to let you love me. Many years later I preached his funeral Mass and told that story. I said that it changed my life and made me want to be a great priest, to learn how to let your love into my life. Please know that it is still a work in progress but that I am committed to it. I love being your priest. Please encourage your sons to follow after me. There is a joy here that you cannot imagine.

Our Lord has been so good to us in so many ways. This month of Thanksgiving is one of those times when we can show our appreciation and gratitude for all we have received from the Lord and all those efforts which build up the Body of Christ and serve and minister to those in need. It is an honor for me to serve you and the Lord here at Saint Anthony's.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.