

May 10 and 11, 2014

**Fourth Sunday of Easter, Lectionary: 49**

**William C. Graham; St. Michael's in Duluth**

Peter and the Eleven were certain in their faith that Jesus was both Lord and Christ. So, what should we do? the crowds asked. Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you ... and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call." The first letter of Peter advises that Jesus left "you an example that you should follow in his footsteps."

This Easter mandate to follow in the footsteps of Jesus is our mandate too here at St. Michael's; we are the Church of God in a developing world, and we are, all of us, called to holiness. We follow in his footsteps, walking in our own shoes! As we set out to walk this path together in the coming years, I am both delighted and alarmed to come home again and continue the pastorate here at St. Michael's. I was sent here as pastor by Bishop Anderson 32 years ago when I was 32 years old. Who would have thought, I certainly didn't, that one can come home again. But remember Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher 500 years before Christ, who observed that "No man ever steps in the same river

twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man.”

We will work together to establish an agenda for ourselves as we seek to proclaim the Reign of God. We already know much of what we must do, and we heard our Bishop's mandate in his kind-but-challenging remarks at the conclusion of Fr. Tom's funeral. He describes us as a worshipping parish; we take our time together very seriously, coming together in delight around book and table. Clearly, we will work to make this experience of the Church at Prayer even richer.

The Bishop also knows us, as we know ourselves, to be a congregation committed to social outreach. We will continue with those ministries, including our Used-a-Bit Shop and other social outreach ministries and, I hope, discovering new ways to collaborate with CHUM under Lee Stuart's good leadership there. We will continue to be faithful to our educational efforts, our school and religious education programs, understanding that in a changing, challenging world, understanding our faith is imperative; all of us are obliged to understand our faith better and appreciate our faith more.

We will continue, both faithful to the gospel call and to our Bishop's mandate, to be an inclusive community, the community described in our Eucharistic prayers as a gathered people, folks from

every land and nation, every language and way of life, sharing in the one eternal banquet with Jesus Christ the Lord. We, all of us, are called to be “Saints among the Saints in the halls of heaven.” Nothing is more difficult for Christian people, for any people, than to live together in peace. But, remember Pope Paul VI, who said prophetically: “If you want peace, work for justice.” And we must be obedient to that call.

I have asked Dr. Chris McMahon and a team he will assemble to invite you, during the next weeks, to reinvigorate parish discussion groups which have served you well recently, and to begin some new ones, to discuss Pope Francis’s recent exhortation to the Christian faithful, “The Joy of the Gospel: *Evangelii Gaudium*.” Really, what could be better than to start our next steps together with the words of Pope Francis and Joy of the Gospel. Together, we can hear his challenging invitation, and work toward renewing our commitment to faithful lives of gospel service. I hope that you will take this invitation very seriously, so that we can chart for ourselves a challenging agenda of hearing, reflecting on and living out the Gospel as the beloved sons and daughters of the Most High God, sisters and brothers in the Body of Christ, guided and driven by the breath of the Holy Spirit. So, clearly, as you read, reflect, pray and discuss, make a list; but, not a list for what

the priest should do! When I am back full time in Duluth, after fulfilling all my remaining commitments elsewhere, I look forward to listening sessions with each of those groups so you can tell me how you envision carrying out Pope Francis's appeal to faithful living, and how your own renewed effort will build up this parish, our city, and serve the unfolding Reign of God.

We must accept our challenge as the author of the First Letter of Peter advises us, "this is a grace before God. / For to this you have been called."

For my part, I will pray, and beg you to pray with me, that my heart be shaped after the heart of Jesus, that I may imitate him as the good shepherd. Together, may all of us incline the ear of our hearts, hoping to hear the voice of Jesus, "I am the gate. / Whoever enters through me will be saved."

I will be a different pastor from the man some of you remember from long ago. I hope that I will be wiser and kinder. I have also prayed impatiently to God asking for the gift of an increase in patience and in prudence. God is apparently still processing that prayer. I know that I may sometimes offend some of you; please: if that happens, come and speak with me. We are daily reminded of our human frailties, but we

are called to be people of God's peace and we reflect Christ's love in us. We know that love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude; it does not insist on its own way. If we are people of God's peace and love, our community will grow. Let us always strive then to be at peace, people of peace.

As your pastor, I want to preach and teach and baptize, handing off as much administrative responsibility as possible to other members of the staff. You have recently hired Chris McMahon as Director of Advancement; the idea, as I understand it, is that he would at some point become the Parish Manager. I would like that point to begin now. I will work with him, the trustees, the parish council, the finance council and the staff to see how we can shape his ministry in a way that will best meet the needs of all concerned. Our model will be Anne Kuyava, who is among the longest-serving employees and members of this parish. She was for many years the office manager here, and met people and duties with grace and efficiency and oodles of common sense. I have asked Chris and Anne to get together soon for coffee, conversation and for her to pray a wise and holy blessing over him.

My model, after Jesus (!), will be Brother Paul Vincent Niebauer, OSB, of Saint John's Abbey. Before he was a monk, he was a ringmaster

in a circus. I have his picture and a votive candle nearby. The ringmaster does little of the actual work, but without him, the circus will descend into chaos. But let us be clear: the ringmaster does not strut around in uniform cracking the whip. In every community there are varieties of gifts, but the same spirit and there are varieties of services but the same Lord and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good... (I Cor. 12). I will seek to help us use our gifts well. I will help us keep our eyes on the goal, the goal of the kingdom of our Risen Lord, the work of His church in His world, the work of our church in Duluth, Minnesota.

May the Spirit of the Living God breathe on us, protect us from all harm and chaos, lead us kindly on, and bring us to everlasting life.

And let the church say: Amen!