

Pastor's Ponderings . . .

On behalf of the entire staff and parish of St. Leo the Great, I offer to you and yours a happy, prosperous and blessed New Year. We believe that each New Year is another opportunity for encountering and embracing the grace and holiness of the God who has come to us in human form and shape to liberate us and to set us free from all that enslaves us.

So, in the words of the prophet Isaiah and the words on the scroll that Jesus opened and proclaimed to the people in the temple, may this year be one in which all people know that Jesus has come "to bring glad tidings to the poor, to announce a year of favor from the Lord, recovery of sight to the blind and to proclaim liberty to captives." As we are thinking about making resolutions for the New Year, let us also resolve to become more aware of just how Jesus has come to build his kingdom in our lives and can we also resolve to help him build this kingdom in the lives of others and in the entire world?

At the beginning of each New Year, especially in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, the hearts of Catholic Christians turn to embracing and praying for the peace that only God can give. On the feast of Mary, the Mother of God, we have the option of using the mass for peace if we so choose. Isn't Mary the perfect model and example of one who has embraced the peace (Jesus Christ) that only God can give us? How can we be more open to welcoming Jesus into our lives and giving him a home in our hearts? In doing this, let us pray for the peace of his presence, of knowing his love for us, our love for him and our willingness to share his love in our homes, neighborhoods, and in a world still formed and shaped by wars and violence.

I am happy to announce to you and invite you to the 6th annual Feast of Epiphany Celebration, Prayer Service and International Pot-Luck Dinner on Sunday, January 8, 2017. Evening prayer begins at 4pm in the church, immediately followed by a bounty of international dishes in the undercroft of the church. Be sure to bring your favorite ethnic dish to share!

As we will continue to celebrate the Feast of Epiphany and the Magi from the East representing all the people of the entire world coming to pay homage to their king, at St. Leo's we give thanks for the graced privileged of being a place where nations from the world are welcomed and can give God praise together. Together, here, God has come to announce a year of favor and to proclaim liberty to captives and glad tidings to the poor. Here, together, we embrace the peace that only God can bring. Here, together, we celebrate our one faith and a New Year filled with the presence of our loving God and king.

With our prayer and worship and by living together the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, we hear and see the

works of the Christ who is ever so present among us. Although we do these things to prepare for the Lord's second coming, we also do these things to celebrate Christmas every day of the year and to acknowledge that our salvation has come, is come and will come again. We continue to build the kingdom that God has already started and handed onto us as we actively wait for God to come back and complete what Jesus started and what the church continues to do in His name.

Our attendance is increasing at both of our weekend Masses. One Saturday evening Mass, there was standing room only. Often on Saturdays and Sundays the church is full and is becoming fuller with parishioners, people from our partner parishes and visitors. Recently I was talking to some visitors and I have heard this also from St. Leo parishioners and members from our partner parishes, and they tell me that the Lord is really present here and they feel his presence and see his works in our worship, our hospitality and in our outreach. These are why they keep coming back or stay as parishioners and why everyone wants to become more involved with us.

We are so blessed by everyone (parishioner, partner, visitor) sharing their time, talent and treasure to build God's kingdom, to prepare the way for the Lord's return and to celebrate his presence among us now. This was so evident at our Christmas Toy and Clothing Sale. We were really worried that we may have had to cancel this long standing tradition of providing the opportunity for people to acquire gifts for their families at Christmas this year. But parishioners, partners and visitors all came together to work this event and provide donations of toys and clothing for a very successful day. I was most

impressed with the kind, loving, and grateful spirit that filled our hall from both the workers and the shoppers. "Is He the one who is to come or shall we look for another?" God is always present in our love for one another.

Thanks for building the kingdom of God. Thanks for all that you do to help make our joy complete and to help us live freely for the Lord and each other. Please come and celebrate with us anytime, won't you? Please know that you are always welcome and bring someone with you. Come all ye faithful, come. Come learn, celebrate and live the faith with us. With our lives, let us always sing, "Joy to the world, the Lord has come!"

- Father Jim

