



St. Rita

catholic community

A Letter From Our Pastoral Administrator

True Festivity

Dear Parishioners,

"Bustle does not make a festival; on the contrary, it can spoil one."

A philosopher's simple reminder, Josef Pieper, in his brilliant little book, *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity* — it's a truth we seem always in need of remembering. In these seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany — when parties and plays and families gather together — it's easy to forget that what we add to our festivities might not add to our festivity, but instead, the opposite.

Many of our celebrations these days are more like "pseudo-festivals," Pieper argued. "Apparently there have been sham festivals all through the ages," he said; it's a "typical phenomenon of a declining society." Signs of "pseudo-festivity" are over-commercialization (such examples should come easily to mind to all of us), politicization (one thinks here of silly controversies surrounding "Merry Christmas"), as well as seeing the holidays as mere opportunities for escape and entertainment, for "forgetting one's worries."

Now such "pseudo-festivity" is pseudo because, fundamentally, it's festivity that is contrived, conjured, and manufactured *by us*. Which is why the fruit of such false festivity is that shallow, dull, fleeting sort of joy, which typically ends in that same old sadness we all know — or sometimes even in greater sadness, believing, falsely as we do, that our festivity is nothing more than mere opiate and distraction from the eternal sadness of everything. There are understandable reasons for the gloom and depression of the season in some. And they are reasons philosophical and spiritual, as much as anything else.

But what marks true festivity? What must we understand and accept so as to have a chance to experience real festivity and not its fake? According to Pieper, we must understand that it's something we cannot make for ourselves, only receive.

There can be no festivity when man, imagining himself self-sufficient, refuses to recognize that Goodness of things which goes far beyond any conceivable utility; it is the Goodness of real-

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ity taken as a whole which validates all other particular goods and which man himself can never produce nor simply translate into social or individual “welfare.” He truly receives it only when he accepts it as pure gift.

At the heart of genuine festivity is that primeval goodness, which God spoke at the beginning in creation — “and God saw that it was good” (Gen. 1:10). It’s a goodness, made entirely by God and given to us, which despite everything (no matter how bitter and dark things get), still exists, because existence still exists; that, despite it all, children are still born, flowers still bloom, the sun still rises, creation remains, that God has not given up. “God saw that it was good.” That’s what’s at the heart of festivity. It’s that joy you felt when you saw your child for the very first time — those tears and that laughter, that parental rapture.

That’s true festivity, an experience of the primal truth and goodness of creation. It’s that momentary experience of what’s always true, but which we do not always see due to work or sin. Real festivity is not an escape from reality, but rather, an experience of a “greater, more real reality.” It’s an experience, albeit momentarily, of Eden redeemed, of that “perpetual though hidden festivity.”

Which is why, as Pieper said, public religion is essential to true festivity,

public worship and praise of God. “In celebrating festivals festively, man passes beyond the barriers of this present life on earth.” That is, in Mass — in Scripture heard and Sacrament received — we’re offered a chance to see reality, *real* reality. In the liturgies of the Church we’re able to call to mind and experience that God-saw-that-it-was-good sort of joy — the joyful experience of that primeval love which has never ended, despite all the evil we know now or will ever know in the future. In that sense, it is an escape — but into truth, not out of it.

It’s what we mean when we say, “Merry Christmas.” Or at least, it’s what we should mean. It’s what we mean also when we talk about putting “Christ back in Christmas.” We’re talk-

ing about the primeval joy of creation renewed in the joy of the birth of the infant Christ.

These are the deeper reasons of these seasons we celebrate. And I agree with the philosopher, that despite everything, the “core and source of festivity itself remains inviolably present in the midst of society.” Which is why I urge you still to hope, why I want you still not to give up. Because God hasn’t.

And it’s why I wish you a merry Christmas. My prayer being simply that you find it. Because it’s there.

pax,

Fr. Joshua



Stewardship and Hospitality for the Advent and Christmas Seasons

It's the Advent and Christmas season. You've extended invitations, planned the menu, and decorated your home. You are ready to be hospitable. But what does it really mean to live the stewardship of hospitality?

The Bible tells us in 1 Peter 4: 8-11, "Above all, let your love for one another be intense, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever preaches, let it be with the words of God; whoever serves, let it be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and dominion forever and ever."

When we read Peter's words, we see that hospitality is more than good manners. We see that hospitality is part of what it means to be a faithful steward. So, during the hustle and bustle of Advent and Christmas, how can we be hospitable?

Open your home to strangers: The holidays can be an especially painful time for people. This year, do something about it. If you're already expecting strang-



ers, welcome them warmly. Decide ahead of time that showing love is more important than passing judgment.

Be truly cheerful: When you open your home for the holidays, you may be a happy host, but are you a cheerful one? Believe it or not, there's a difference. A happy person feels happiness. A cheerful person causes happiness.

Use your gifts to serve: Hosting and serving go together. You bake the turkey, pour the drinks, and slice the pie. To some degree, this is expected and normal. What's not normal is for a host to truly serve — to look for the needs in others and the gifts in

themselves and find even a small way to help.

Give God glory: When family, friends and strangers enter your home, it's an opportunity for them to see Christ in you. You never know what's going on behind the scenes in people's lives or how much an encounter like this might mean to them. So when you welcome and serve your guests, remember that your ultimate goal is to give God glory.

Advent and Christmas give us the opportunity to reflect on Jesus' call to live as stewards and disciples of His Word, and through hospitality we can live that calling.

North Dallas Shared Ministries Truly Put Christ's Service into Action

Carole George wanted to find a way to put her Catholic faith in action. The mission of North Dallas Shared Ministries, helping the working poor, spoke to her then as it still does today.

"Volunteering has helped me to see Jesus in others, to be more grateful for the blessings in my life, and to seek to share my gifts more with others," Carole says.

North Dallas Shared Ministries — NDSM — is a ministry with a charitable mission to help low-income people assume as much responsibility for their lives as they are able.

"Our goal as an organization is simple — to deliver aid as efficiently and effectively as possible," Carole says. "Since our founding, we have overwhelmingly relied on volunteers — over 500 at present — to fulfill our mission."

As outlined on its website at ndsm.org, the ministry has four main goals — to provide emergency assistance; to help these individuals access entitlement, health and community programs designed to help them achieve long-term stability; to promote their wellness and financial independence; and to develop resource materials that can lead them to additional services and support.



Interviewing clients to help determine needs

NDSM grew out of the frustration of five clergy with the inefficient and ineffective ways they were attempting to assist the needy who came to their churches for aid.

"These five visionaries knew that their individual charitable efforts weren't sufficient and hoped that a cooperative approach would yield better results," Carole says. "In 1983, they formed an independent non-profit agency."

Today, NDSM provides support to individuals and families through so many ways including a food pantry, emergency financial assistance and a clothes closet. They also offer a senior food program, school uniforms and supplies, assistance in accessing food stamps and Medicaid, ESL classes, job counseling, income tax preparation, and even free medical and dental clinics.

Carole volunteers in the medical clinic and serves as St. Rita's representative to NDSM. In 1991,

when she first connected with the ministry, she particularly appreciated their flexibility around her full-time work schedule. She feels that she has grown personally through her work with the ministry.

"I feel that I have a fuller view of life in Dallas and more empathy towards those in difficult life circumstances, often beyond their control," Carole says.

There are many opportunities for volunteers to give through NDSM. On the emergency aid side, volunteers are needed to serve as receptionists, perform client intake, interview clients about their needs, and work in the food pantry, clothes closet or by doing data entry.

At the Medical and Dental Clinics, the ministry needs receptionists, data entry volunteers and volunteer professionals including nurses, doctors, NP/PAs, dental hygienists and assistants.

If you feel called to put your faith into action, consider giving your time and talents to serve members of our community in need through North Dallas Shared Ministries.

"NDSM offers the opportunity to put Christ's ministry to the poor in action, while giving volunteers the flexibility in scheduling that most need in today's busy world," Carole says.

For more information about North Dallas Shared Ministries, contact Carole George at 972-243-5359 or c-george1838@sbcglobal.net, or visit ndsm.org and connect with Ruth Ann Janson, Volunteer Director, at volunteer.director@ndsm.org.

Dallas CASA Advocates for the Greatest Needs

"My Time Could Not Be Better Spent"

Larry Dolan had been a salesman for 25 years and felt he wanted to do something more meaningful with his life. Then, he saw an advertisement in the paper, seeking advocates for Dallas CASA — Court Appointed Special Advocates. Larry felt called to respond.

"Since I've been with CASA, I strongly feel that my time could not be better spent," he says. "There is no one else doing what I am doing for these kids. You can make a profound difference."

CASA formed approximately 40 years ago when a superior court judge grew concerned about the child welfare system and the growing number of cases about which he felt information was lacking. Dallas CASA was one of three pilot programs subsequently formed.

According to the non-profit organization's mission, CASA volunteers "advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children under the protective care of the state, so they will have safe, permanent homes where they can thrive."

"This judge went into the community calling for advocates and established a training program," Larry says. "Every year, St. Rita gives us the opportunity to present CASA



Dallas CASA volunteer ceremony

to the community. It's a chance for people to get out of the pews and do something."

Like Larry, individuals who are interested in serving the community through CASA attend an informational and then can choose to begin their 30 hours of training.

"They learn everything about the juvenile justice system," Larry says. "They learn how the kids come into care and about the Texas penal code. They study stories of abused children."

After training, advocates are sworn in by the court and then appointed by judges to advocates for children in specific cases.

Advocating for the needs of these children who are now in foster care means, in short, that the advocate is a source of consistent care in their lives.

"It involves everything you would normally do as a parent," Larry says. "If there are issues at their school, you

would go to the school. If there are therapy issues not being addressed, you would go to the therapist. You address medical issues or anything else that arises."

According to dallascasa.org, over 1,000 advocates serve 2,700 children each year in Dallas County.

"I'm a firm believer in time well spent that is fulfilling for all those involved," Larry says. "Advocates truly advocate for these children."

Larry has found that working with CASA has been deeply meaningful. He would encourage others to consider finding out more about this opportunity to serve the youngest members of our community.

"We appreciate that St. Rita gives us the opportunity to share about CASA," Larry says. "There is a great need, and we are always looking for more people."

If you would like more information about Dallas CASA, visit dallascasa.org or reach out to Larry Dolan at 214-357-0815 or lj.dolan@att.net.

Focusing Our Hearts Heavenward **The Origin and Beauty of the Nativity Scene**

With all the commercialism surrounding Christmastime, it's far too easy for us to lose sight of the true reason behind the season. Overwhelmed by our endless to-do lists and the hustle and bustle of last-minute shopping, our focus quickly shifts away from the Christ Child's birth. And yet, hidden amongst the holly wreaths and garlands, the Christmas Nativity remains a tangible reminder of the Incarnation, pulling us back into time for a moment as we reflect upon the incredible gift of Christ's birth.

Interestingly, it was circumstances much like our own today which first led St. Francis of Assisi to recreate the Nativity scene nearly 800 years ago. Frustrated with the growing materialism and greed that seemed to pervade 13th century Italy, St. Francis wanted a way to visually remind people of Christ's humble beginnings — to show them that Christmas isn't about pomp and circumstance or material goods, but rather about unselfish love. Describing the idea to his friend Giovanni, St. Francis wrote, "I want to do something that will recall the memory of that child who was born in Bethlehem, to see with bodily eyes the inconveniences of his infancy, how he lay in the manger, and how the ox and ass stood by."

And so St. Francis' idea took form on Christmas Eve in 1223. This original Nativity scene was a living one,



even including an actual ox and ass. Villagers were deeply moved by the silent display of humble beauty, and the Nativity tradition soon spread throughout Italy and surrounding Europe. It is a tradition that remains today in nearly every Christian church and in many homes. In fact, it's hard to imagine Christmas without a Nativity scene somewhere.

Coming in various sizes and styles, each Nativity replica continues to focus our hearts on the true meaning of Christmas — to help us remember that Christmas isn't about the amount of gifts under the tree or the festive

decorations, but rather about celebrating Christ's birth. Many families have a tradition of hiding the Infant Jesus, only placing Him in the crib on Christmas morning. This helps build anticipation during the Advent season as we anxiously await the Divine's birth. Others go a step further, actually wrapping up the Christ Child to be opened as the very first gift of Christmas.

Yet, whatever your family's particular traditions, we hope that the Christmas Nativity continues to draw your heart heavenward this Christmas season — to center us all on the greatest gift ever given, our Incarnate Lord.

2017 Advent and Christmas Calendar

Advent Confession Schedule:

- Communal Reconciliation Services, Thursdays
- Dec. 7 (begins at 7:30 p.m.)
- Dec. 14 (begins at 6:30 p.m. for First Confessions)
- Dec. 21 (Parish Penance Service at 7 p.m.)
- NO CONFESSIONS on Thursday, Dec. 28
- NO CONFESSIONS on Saturday, Dec. 30

Holy Hour Thursday

Dec. 7 at 7:15 p.m.

Holy Hour is canceled for these Thursdays in December

- Dec. 14
- Dec. 21
- Dec. 28

Wednesday, Dec. 20

"Catholics Come Home for Christmas," 6:30-9 p.m.

Saturday Confessions

- Dec. 2
- Dec. 9
- Dec. 16
- Dec. 23
- NO CONFESSIONS on Dec. 30

Family Advent Celebration

Sunday, Dec. 3

"Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming," 3 p.m.

Holy Day of Obligation, Dec. 8

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Mass Schedule:

Thursday, Dec. 7

5:30 p.m., Vigil Mass

Friday, Dec. 8

- 6:25 a.m., Mass
- 8 a.m., Mass
- 12:10 p.m., Mass
- 5:30 p.m., Mass
- 7 p.m., Bilingual Mass

Our Lady of Guadalupe Celebrations

Dec. 11

- 6:30 p.m. Convivio — Sweeney Hall
- 7:45 p.m., Procession of Our Lady of Guadalupe
- 8 p.m. Mañanitas

Dec. 12

- 7 p.m. Misa de Guadalupe
- 8 p.m. Dinner

Solemn Vespers

Sunday, Dec. 10 — 4:30 p.m.

Posada y Pastorela

Friday, Dec. 15 — 6:30 p.m.-10 p.m.

Advent Lessons and Carols

Sunday, Dec. 17 — 7:30 p.m.

Fourth Sunday of Advent Mass Schedule

Saturday, Dec. 23

5:30 p.m. (Vigil)

Sunday, Dec. 24

- 7 a.m.
- 9 a.m.
- 10:45 a.m.
- 12:30 p.m. (Bilingual)

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Weekday Masses

*Monday-Friday, 6:25 a.m. & 5:30 p.m.
Wednesday & Friday (Only when School
is in session), 8:00 a.m.*

Weekend Masses

*Saturday, 5:30 p.m.
Sunday, 7:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m., 10:45 a.m.,
12:30 p.m. (Bilingual), 5:30 p.m.*

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Christmas Eve Mass Schedule

Sunday, Dec. 24

4 p.m., two Masses (in Church with Children's Choirs/in Sweeney/Simulcast in Dining Hall)

6 p.m., one Mass with Lux Mundi Contemporary Ensemble (in Church/Simulcast in Dining Hall)

9:30 p.m., Caroling with St. Rita Choir and Strings (in Church)

10 p.m., The Solemn Mass at Night (in Church, incense)

Sunday, Dec. 25

9 a.m., Mass (in Church) – Bilingual

11 a.m., Mass with Festival Brass (in Church)

Dec. 26 through Dec. 30

Regular Mass and Confession Schedule:

Monday through Friday, 5:30 p.m., Mass (No 6:25 a.m. or 8 a.m. Masses this week)

Thursday, Dec. 28, **NO Confessions or Holy Hour**

Saturday, Dec. 30, 8 a.m., Mass

Saturday, Dec. 30, **NO Confessions**

Saturday, Dec. 30, 5:30 p.m. Vigil

Dec. 31 — Regular Mass Schedule

7 a.m.

9 a.m.

10:45 a.m.

12:30 p.m. (Bilingual)

Holy Day of Obligation, Jan. 1

The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

Dec. 31, 5:30 p.m., Vigil Mass

Jan. 1, 9 a.m., Mass