



St. Rita

catholic community

A Letter From Our Pastoral Administrator

Reflections on Sunday: *Part One*

Since the beginning, Christians have kept Sunday holy. It was on the Lord's Day John heard the trumpet and the loud voice, ushering him into the vision of God's victory (Rev. 1:10). We know from the earliest Christian sources such as St. Ignatius and the *Didache* that Sunday was the day on which Christians gathered to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. St. Jerome, at the turn of the fifth century, said, "Sunday is the day of the resurrection, it is the day of Christians, it is our day." Sunday was so important that Christians preferred even to risk their lives than forsake the holiness and worship of God on Sunday. In North Africa in 304, a group of Christians were arrested while celebrating Mass in someone's home on Sunday. When the judge asked the owner of the house why he allowed such a gathering, his only answer was that these fellow Christians were his brothers and sisters. When the judge replied that he nonetheless should have prohibited such a gathering, the owner of the home answered, "Without the day of the Lord, we cannot live."



Today, Christians think differently. Many today treat Sunday worship as something entirely optional, as merely part of the weekend. Too many give up going to Church on Sunday if there's something else allegedly more important scheduled, or if they just feel like sleeping in. It apparently doesn't bother some Christians to leave off going to Church on Sundays for weeks at a time, supplying worthwhile excuses for their absence. Many

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Reflections on Sunday: *Part One* continued from front cover

Christian parents seemingly have no qualms about taking their children to games or tournaments on Sundays instead of to the worship of God. Once, Christians preferred the risk of persecution and death to missing the Sunday assembly of their brothers and sisters. Now they prefer the entertainments of a godless culture, remembering the God who created them only faintly or when convenient. It seems the murderous emperors of Rome needn't have ever killed Christians. They only needed open shopping malls and sporting leagues, and the Church would have faded to nothing in a mere few generations.

This is undoubtedly a rather harsh conviction, and I do want to push against your conscience a bit. Yet, my purpose is more significant than that. Going to Mass on Sunday is not some antique cultural obligation. The point of Sunday is about hallowing time and honoring God. It's also about formation of the body of Christ individually and corporately. When Christian parents take their children somewhere other than Church on Sundays,

they are doing remarkable damage not only to their children but also to the Church – teaching in effect a sinister and ungodly priority. It simply doesn't matter how much our excuses are tricked out with spiritual sentimentality. What is happening is the malformation of the saints of God in the shape of something other than eucharistic holiness of Christ. That is, when Christians gather on Sundays to worship and adore God in Christ and to share in His rest, they are practically, but also very deeply, shaping their lives after the pattern God gave as a gift in creation and redemption. When we give over our Sundays to God, not only in worship, but in rest, we are allowing the very pattern and rhythm of our lives to be molded by God. The alternative is what the Bible has always called idolatry. To allow something other than God to mold your existence and set your daily patterns is the very logic of idolatry. Thus, idolatry gives way to slavery. This may appear extreme, but the sinister is often subtle and comes supplied with very good reasons.

If this offends you, ask yourself why. Being a Catholic is demanding. Discipleship is no leisure activity. We are each of us prizes in a primeval and relentless war, and this war is waged through the subtle invitations of belonging. We are enticed to belong either to that which gives life or to that which gives death. Our life is found in Jesus Who calls His sons and daughters together every week on the day of His resurrection. He calls us together to be with Him, to be with each other, and to be finally human beings redeemed together into the image of God. Sunday worship is essential to who we are. So, what shapes your existence? What sets the rhythm of your life? What do you worship? You can't say you love someone and only sparingly show it. These are urgent questions which must be asked. Without the day of the Lord, we cannot live.

pax,
Fr. Joshua

Dads' Club Creating Fun in the Name of Saying "Thanks"

Every June, families throughout the country take a day to celebrate dads by encouraging them to do some of their favorite things. Here at St. Rita, we are blessed to have an organization that encourages dads to do their favorite things in the name of great cause.

Each school year, the Dads' Club hosts a series of events meant not only to engage the dads of the St. Rita community, but also to raise funds to host appreciation events for the St. Rita faculty. Marlon Cortez, dad to fifth-grader Caroline and first-grader Ethan, serves as President of the Dads' Club board and recently explained what makes it such a special group.

"We're very passionate about entrusting the majority of our children's time to the faculty at St. Rita, and if we're going to entrust them with that, we want to make sure that we can provide things above and beyond compensation for doing their work," Marlon says. "We believe that the faculty at St. Rita is there because they're passionate about serving and helping our children not only from



Families attending the Dads' Club pasta and movie night held to raise funds to celebrate the St. Rita School staff take a quick break for a photo. Evenings such as these are one of the many ways the club encourages families, and especially dads, to spend time with others in the St. Rita community while giving back to the school.

a religious perspective but also with the building blocks that help them matriculate. They do that out of a passion, and not necessarily for money."

As Marlon explains, rather than simply asking families to send a check or provide money for these thank-you events, the Dads' Club is actively engaged in building community in the process.

"We hold a series of events aimed at families and at dads specifically, where dads from all grades and ages can get together, meet each other and have fun," he says.

Some of the more anticipated events hosted by the club have included an annual welcome barbeque held at the beginning of the school year, Trunk or Treat, a bags game tournament, guy's

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"There's nothing better than when teachers come up and say 'thank you.' They're not just thanking you for the gift – they're thanking you for recognizing them. Those are things that transcend any monetary value. The servant attitude that the faculty have, you see that not only with the children, but with the families as well." – Marlon Cortez

Thanking Dr. Elena Hines for

This summer, Dr. Elena Hines is retiring after 26 years as the principal of St. Rita Catholic School. Over the years, she has left a legacy of hard work, faith, dedication and love for her staff and students.

Dr. Hines has been at St. Rita since 1991, and prior, was a principal in the Diocese of Dallas since 1983.

"I've had a wonderful experience over the years," she says. "I have grown professionally, and met some dedicated and committed parents and teachers. I have been able to see so many students grow into adulthood, or send their children to school at their alma mater. All of this has been very rewarding for me."

Over the years, Dr. Hines can easily recall a variety of memorable moments.

"I remember the celebration we had when we became a Blue Ribbon



School—it was such a joyful experience for everyone," she says. "Going to the Pines with the eighth grade every year has been a highlight, too. I was able to get to know the students so much better on those trips.

"Seeing my former students come back as adults and having their

children at St. Rita is another very fond memory," she adds. "In addition, several of my former students have come back to teach here. I currently have one teacher who was in my first graduating class in 1992!"

Administrative Assistant Carolyn Shaw first came to the school when her youngest child – who is now 27 – started kindergarten. She and Dr. Hines have enjoyed a close friendship ever since.

"We've been through a lot together!" Carolyn says. "We've been through grandchildren, marriages in our families, bishops, pastors, presidents, even hairstyles together! She was also my husband's RCIA sponsor. I think [her faith] is her biggest asset and legacy.

"I also appreciate the fact that she places a lot of trust in me," she adds. "She respects my decisions and has confidence in my performance. We share and collaborate on a lot of things, both personal and professional!"

Throughout the past 26 years, Dr. Hines has earned overwhelming admiration and respect from her colleagues.

"Dr. Hines has always exuded confidence, professionalism and authority, while still being very approachable," says middle school Spanish teacher and Diocesan Speech League director Señora Andrea Schweitzer. "Her encouragement and

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– Dr. Elena Hines

26 Years of Service

guidance over the years, along with her trust and support, have continually challenged me to work hard and strive for excellence."

"I will miss knowing that even if we don't see something eye-to-eye, she is open to listen and that she won't judge," says Instructional Support Mrs. Marjorie Lane, who started working at St. Rita the year before Dr. Hines. "I know that she's got my back and wants me to be successful. She understands that my first and foremost purpose is to advocate for the students. She has more confidence in me than I, myself, do! I don't have to prove myself to her."

Andrea and Marjorie both agree that a large part of Dr. Hines' legacy is her work to increase inclusivity at the school.

"She has worked hard to increase the diversity in our student body over the years, partly by making scholarship opportunities more readily available to those in need," Señora Schweitzer says.

"In 1994, the school opened its doors to trying to be more inclusive. The Instructional Support position was also created in order to help teachers make accommodations with their students," Mrs. Lane says. "At that point, St. Rita School became more of a parish school and less of a private school. Obviously, we are

limited with funds, but at the very least, our parish families know that we do care and want to include all of their children if possible. It has also helped our students to become more compassionate toward people with Down syndrome, autism, ADHD, and learning differences."

While Dr. Hines is looking forward to sleeping late and traveling more often during her retirement, she admits that she will truly miss St. Rita School.

"I will miss the children and the opportunity to see them grow and mature," she says. "I will also miss this community, this village, that will so generously help others in need. I have never worked in a place where people are so giving of their time and talent for the good of the school and for others."

After retiring, she hopes to continue serving children by giving of her own time.

"I would like to volunteer at one of our inner-city schools," Dr. Hines says. "I'd like to work with some of our second language learners who might need some extra help."

If her legacy here at St. Rita is any indication, Dr. Hines will certainly be giving a great gift to everyone she meets going forward.

"She never wavers at the helm," Carolyn says. "She is a mentor. She is flexible and forgiving, and admits mistakes. She is a great listener and problem solver, whether the situation is with a 5-year-old or her oldest employee. She has rarely missed any performance, and she has attended many football, basketball and soccer games. She has made 26 graduation speeches, signed over 50,000 report cards, written over 5,000 newsletters and over 7,000 morning notes. I could go on and on! She will be missed."



Support for Marriages to Last a Lifetime

The dress. The flowers. The menu. There's usually a million things to accomplish between "Will you marry me?" and "I do." But for couples preparing to be married at St. Rita's, we hope to help not only in preparing for the details of the big day, but also in supporting couples as they plan for a marriage that will last a lifetime.

"When I first heard we had to go through the sponsor couple program, I was thinking of it from a task-oriented perspective," says Emily Anderson, who married her husband, John, at St. Rita's, last year. "But we came out of each session feeling positive and excited to talk further about the things that we had introduced in the session."

"Most of the couples that we have sponsored have always said they were at first unsure as to why, in order to get married in the Church, would they have to participate in this ministry," says Mary Ann Niles, who, along with her husband Steve, has served as a sponsor couple for the past nine years. "Many of them are stressed from work, planning their wedding, etc. But by the time we reach our final session, 99 percent said they were so glad to have had the experience."

As part of the marriage preparation requirements at St. Rita's, couples must take the FOCCUS profile, assessing their relationship and communication in several areas, including family of origin, communication, intimacy, and marriage as a sacrament. Following this assessment, the engaged couple is paired with a sponsor couple, with whom they meet on four different occasions, in the sponsor couple's home, to discuss their results and their strengths, as well as areas that may indicate a need for further conversation.



Emily and John Anderson were married at St. Rita's last year.

Tom and Denise Stilz serve to coordinate the pairing of sponsor couples with those preparing for marriage, and also facilitate the training of new sponsor couples. They were married at St. Rita's 24 years ago, and went through the sponsor couple program themselves. They have served as a sponsor couple for the past 19 years.

"You're trying to stir a conversation with the engaged couples in areas that may be a challenge or concern," says Tom of the primary role of sponsor couples. "They're not teaching sessions, as much as they're to facilitate the engaged couple to communicate."

"The sessions engage couples to speak about issues they will undoubtedly face when married," adds Steve Niles. "The setting is confidential and relaxed. We aren't

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"It helps to have a reference of what a good Catholic marriage looks like. In a holy marriage, how do they treat each other and make decisions? Some are lucky enough to have that, in parents or someone else. But you might not, and your sponsor couple might be the only good reference you have when you're starting down that road." – John Anderson

Support for Marriages to Last a Lifetime

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therapists. All we can share is how our faith has ministered to us and what has worked for us.”

This program is an opportunity for engaged couples to be mentored, one-on-one, by a more experienced couple. For many, being able to see Catholic marriage modeled is invaluable as they prepare to enter into the sacrament.

“It helps to have a reference of what a good Catholic marriage looks like,” says John Anderson. “In a holy marriage, how do they treat each other and make decisions? Some are lucky enough to have that, in parents or someone else. But you might not, and your sponsor couple might be the only good reference you have when you’re starting down that road.”

For many of the couples that go through the program, learning to communicate effectively is one of the most valuable takeaways.

“It gave us tools for communicating about bigger problems that might come up during marriage,” says Denise Stilz. “Oftentimes, when you’re engaged, you don’t see the potential for problems because everything’s kind of rosy. We took those skills into our marriage, so when more serious things did come up in the course of our marriage, we had those tools.

“A lot of these topics don’t come up in normal conversation, and you’re forced to deal with them in the program,” she continues. “It makes for a stronger relationship.”

And as Emily notes, communication and conflict resolution were interwoven into all of the discussed topics.

“Hearing how they handled different issues, that was really helpful,” Emily says.

Couples also benefit from the opportunity to discuss topics and areas of potential disagreement, which they may not have previously considered.

“It provided a good platform for John and I to talk about things that don’t come up as naturally in conversation in the middle of wedding planning,” Emily says with a smile.

For John and Emily, having a sponsor couple was one of the most valuable parts of their marriage preparation, as it was tailored to focus specifically on their unique relationship and issues particularly significant to them, as a couple.

“Because they had the result from the FOCCUS profile, we were able to find relevant topics specific to our relationship, and focus on those,” John says.

“I think the one-on-one environment allows you and your spouse to be more vulnerable, and our couple was really welcoming and I felt like we could both be pretty open,” Emily adds.

The Andersons also appreciated being able to hear from the real-life experience of another couple.

“The biggest thing was having them share their personal experiences,” John says. “It was really helpful to hear someone giving a personal account of situations that they were able to handle because of the way they viewed their marriage and the attitude they went into it with.”

Those who serve as sponsor couples also find it to be a blessing to their own relationship, helping them grow closer together as they journey alongside another couple.

“It’s a refresher in keeping our marriage strong,” Denise says.

“We love serving in this ministry because we realized that we benefit just as much, in our own married life, when serving the couples we sponsor,” Mary Ann adds. “If you have the time to give, think of helping newly engaged couples that are discerning marriage. It will enrich your own marriage, as well.”

For more information about becoming a sponsor couple, please contact Tom and Denise Stilz at 972-702-9838 or Dstilz@earthlink.net.

12521 Inwood Road
Dallas, TX 75244

Weekday Masses

Monday-Friday, 5:30 p.m.

Wednesday-Saturday, 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.

Dads' Club Creating Fun in the Name of Saying "Thanks"

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night's out, and a pasta dinner and movie night held at the parish. Dads are also seen in and around the school with events such as the Mix It Up lunch, which is held in cooperation with the Anti-Bullying Campaign, and a bocce ball tournament held on the last day of school.

"Probably the largest fundraiser event that we do is the St. Rita Golf Tournament," Marlon says. "We have about 140 participants in that event every year. We've got people who are scratch golfers and then we also

have people who play once a year, so it's a great mix of folks. People aren't really concerned about winning. It's more about getting together for an afternoon of fun and being with folks for a while that they might not get to see often."

The benefit of these get-togethers stems not only from the connection dads are able to form among their peers, but also from the long-lasting impact the money raised can have on their children's teachers. The group holds an annual appreciation

dinner at the Brookhaven Country Club each December, and Marlon says it's a moment to lavish thanks on the St. Rita faculty and celebrate their accomplishments.

"There's nothing better than when teachers come up and say 'thank you,'" he says. "They're not just thanking you for the gift – they're thanking you for recognizing them. Those are things that transcend any monetary value. The servant attitude that the faculty have, you see that not only with the children, but with the families as well."

*All dads of St. Rita students are automatically enrolled in the Dads' Club.
Questions? Contact Marlon Cortez at 214-208-2160 or mcortextx@yahoo.com.*