

Thanksgiving Message from Fr. Tom

Dear Parish Family of Assumption,

As I make final preparations to retire, just coming off the great American celebration of Thanksgiving, I think of the words of the Dominican Mystic, Meister Eckhart: "If the only prayer we ever pray is Thank You, it is sufficient." I think we are at our best when we gather for Mass. Eucharist, after all, means Thanksgiving. A grateful heart indicates a response from a heart that is not turned inward. As I prepare to retire after Christmas, I wanted to thank you for making me feel welcomed when I arrived on February 5th, 1999 and throughout the years. I am grateful for your faith, your hope and your love. My faith in God has been bolstered, nourished and enhanced journeying with you these past years.

It has been a pure blessing in the ways you have taught me God is love, we are all more than our mistakes, the smallest and largest of sins can be forgiven and that the wisdom of Jesus of Nazareth is relevant and needed now more than ever. I have both experienced and observed how you deal with the joy of birth, baptism, engagement and marriage, as we traveled through the seasons each year; summer, fall, winter and spring. You reflected to me how open your minds and hearts can be to the wisdom of not just believing, but belonging to a community of sinners and saints by leaving judgment to God and to God alone. It takes a deep faith to reserve judgment and it takes a faith vision to lavish mercy on those who have hurt or offended us.

You have taught me this Christ-like wisdom that the Truth will set you free, but may first make you miserable. You have also taught me the wisdom, in an age when I needed to hear it, that the truth is incontrovertible. Ignorance may attack it, malice may deride it, but in the end there it is. The truth that sets us free from hatred and hurt is to imitate Christ who pleaded with his Father to "Forgive them for they know not what they do." What a relief it is to let go of the human and un-Christ-like desire to hit back, hurt back or hate back. I have seen over the years how often you choose life over death by choosing mercy over revenge. You will never know how your lives have changed mine. It was as if you were all standing at the pulpit from the pews through your everyday living, preaching to me and challenging me to be more merciful toward myself and all who have hurt me.

I always felt as Shepherd of the little flock that grazes on the banks of the Saugatuck, it was you who lead me to greener pastures. Each time I approached the pulpit an inner voice, thanks to my Boston College Teacher, Christiane Brusselmans, would echo in my memory, "Tom, give them good news!" When I would look out at you week after week, I would see the faces of many who were mourning, anxious, stressed, perplexed and deeply concerned about real and invented matters. Yet there you were, faithfully showing up and never giving up. This I shall miss the most, being at Mass with you all. You were the Good News that encouraged me. If they can do it, so can I. What life lessons you have taught me.

It has been a good run for me. I am grateful to you for your many acts of kindness most, of them secret. To our Catechists, thank you for never giving up on sharing the good news with our children. To our Ministers at the Altar, thank you for your fidelity, reverence and help. Stay fixed on the service you provide and be patient with those who confuse "norms" with renewal of heart, for this too shall all pass. To our Sacristans, Altar Linen Ladies and to all who help water plants and decorate the Church for the feasts, thank you for keeping God's House and Altar immaculate. To our St. Matthew Club who tally the Sunday offerings, thank you. To our Parish and Finance Council Members, thank you for your leadership, guidance and wisdom in providing not just ideas, but your time.

To our Ushers and RCIA team, thank you for providing both security and a warm welcome to our parish family, their guests and those interested in joining our faith. To our young Altar Servers (grade 4-12), your assistance enhances our Mass and gives glory to God.

To our Social Concerns and Knights of Columbus, please slow down but never stop loving the poor, the hungry and those who our culture easily dismisses as a burden. To our youth, you are not the future of the Church, NOW you are the Church. May you always feel welcome, needed and important NOW. To our young parents, be careful what you teach them, the children may just learn it. Thank you for being a parent and not a friend, thank you for finding a loving way to say no and for the sacrificial way you die to self for your spouse and your children. A child's image of God is primarily formed by memories of mommy and daddy.

To our Seniors (our parish elders) who have been on the journey for so long, thanks for providing perspective, giving us the big picture and for inspiring us to keep the faith in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health until death. To our Staff, keep up the good work, keep reminding yourself it is about service to parishioners and that each parent, child and parishioner comes with unique ideas and images of God, Church and the importance of Sunday Worship. Thanks for your patience and for the way you all come together to support one another and the mission of Assumption. To the Music Ministry, if I could have assigned myself to every 10:30am Sunday Mass, I would have. Thanks for your hard work and hours of rehearsing to make Sunday, Christmas, Easter and special events festive and pleasing to the ear, giving glory to God. Finally, to our parish families and our single Catholics who belong, show up, give generously, pray well, sing well and inspire faith and mercy, thank you. You provide the food we give and the gifts we share. You keep the faith and give witness that mercy is the way, love is greater than hate and God is nearer to us than we are to ourselves. Thank you for keeping the faith alive.

To our new Pastor, get ready, your greatest blessings await you and your best years of priesthood are about to unfold. Thank you for your "yes" to the call and please enjoy leading this little flock on the banks of the Saugatuck. May God who has begun this good work in us, one day bring it to completion.

In His Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Tom". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a horizontal line under the name.