

**24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary time****(B)****September 13, 2009**

Peter is surely one of the most beloved figures in the New Testament. In part this is because of his bold proclamations of faith. "You are the Christ," he declares. In part this is because of his marvelous capacity to put his foot in his mouth. Jesus teaches the disciples that "the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected ... and be killed." So Peter takes Jesus aside to straighten him out, "to rebuke him," only to have Jesus rebuke him and declare that "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me."

Today I want to follow Jesus and take up one of the particular crosses in my life as the pastor of our parish community. I need to talk about our parish finances. (Let's hope I don't put my foot in my mouth.)

Let me start with our renovations on the church which are making getting into church a little more of a challenge these days. The brick work, as you can see on the west side, is proceeding. The Otto Baum Company tells us they are on schedule and the work should be completed before the snow flies. The tiles for the roof arrived this past week and should start going on next week. Those daring men on our roof have been preparing the roof. They too expect to complete the work this fall.

In our capital campaign last Fall we pledged about 2.3 million dollars, primarily for the repair and renovation of this church building. The cost for all the work this Fall is about 1.3 million dollars. To date we have received approximately \$1,152,000 and by and large people are honoring their pledges. We will be able to pay for this fall's work.

Of course, our campaign aimed to accomplish much more. We hope to repair, clean and seal the remaining stained glass windows next year. The following year we would like to proceed to repair the plaster and attend to some other needed repairs and renovations in the church basement and the rectory. At this point we do not have the pledges to accomplish all that.

With the money we do have available, we must also pay the cost of the campaign and our Annual Diocesan Appeal goal for this year and next year. In the current year our goal is

\$107,687. In addition, the diocese has insisted that we pay on our existing debt which was incurred in purchasing and renovating the Parish Center and some other expenses, all of which were incurred before 2002. Thus we have used \$200,000 from last Fall's campaign to reduce our parish debt, which now stands at c. 880,000.

First, let me thank you all again for a very generous response to our campaign last fall which came at an extremely difficult time. I thank you for this and encourage all of us to continue to meet our pledges if we possibly can. I realize that circumstances have changed for some people and they cannot do this. We certainly understand this. On the other hand, circumstances have also changed in a positive way for some people. Perhaps there are some of you who made a onetime gift last year because of the uncertainty of the future and are now able to consider a further gift or pledge. There may be some who were not in a position to make a pledge or gift last year but now are. There may be some of you who are new to the parish and may be able to help in some way with renovations. Please let us know if any of these contingencies apply to you.

Less pleasant news is the state of the regular finances of our parish. In the last fiscal year, which ended June 30<sup>th</sup>, we gave \$1,085,000 in our regular Sunday Collections. With other sources of revenue our total income was \$ 1,417,000. However our expenses exceeded our income by \$99,000.

In the current fiscal year which began July 1, our projected expenses are running ahead of our revenue by more than \$26,000. At this rate our deficit will reach more than \$125, 000 for this fiscal year. We will print all these figures in the bulletin next week , i.e., our report for the last year and our budget for the current year and our present situation.

Quite simply we are no longer meeting our expenses. Our support of Trinity Grade School and Central Catholic High School is a major portion of our budget, but by no means are they the only expenses in seeking to provide a full and active parish life.

I have become increasingly convinced that the only way we will be able to support an active parish life and our schools is for us to take tithing seriously. In the Old Testament tithing was

the practice of setting aside one-tenth of one's income for sacred purposes. Jesus did not disapprove of the practice though he made it clear the weightier matters of justice and mercy were his, and must be our, first priority.

Nonetheless, tithing remains a good benchmark toward which we must keep moving. In meeting our financial responsibilities, we need to start with God's portion. After all, what do we have that is not first a gift of God? Typically, tithing sets aside 5% of total income for the support of our local church, the other 5 % goes toward other charitable efforts. If we would do this as a parish, if every household would participate, we would soon have enough be able to stabilize tuitions and meet our parish expenses readily.

The diocese of Wichita, Kansas is often cited as the prime example. What started in one parish 25-30 years ago , tithing of time, talent and treasure, has spread throughout the diocese. Now in that diocese schools are tuition free and parishes are thriving. We are a long way from there. But we need to move very intentionally and consciously in this same direction. It is really a question of putting God first in our fiancés, as in every other way. It is a long journey, but we must begin. I encourage everyone of us, myself included, to take a step (or several) toward this 5% benchmark in your support of our shared mission as Holy Trinity Parish. If each of us take a step in this direction now, and continue in this direction, we will with God's help insure the flourishing of our parish and our schools.

I am not suggesting this will be easy, especially in these difficult times. But Jesus made abundantly clear to Peter and to us, it will not be easy. If we wish to follow him, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross. Whatever the loss, it may be the only way we allow God to save us. The spiritual challenge of all this talk about finance is this; can we put God first – in our finances and in every way- in the confidence that God will provide for our needs. As the letter of James suggests, let's demonstrate our faith from our works.