

SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME C - 2025)

In just a week and a half, the holy Season of Lent will begin and with it our efforts to grow closer to God through acts of prayer, penance and almsgiving. I plan to say more about these things next week.

However, today I want to focus in on two things you can do all year, but I want you to think about and pray about and consider starting them when Lent begins.

The first is spending some time in Adoration each week, and the second is joining one of our parish ark small groups.

Three years ago, during the Season of Lent, I began to make the case for building a parish ark. I got the idea from Noah. The Bible tells us that in Noah's time, the people had become depraved. So God resolved to destroy the world and start over with Noah and his sons and daughters-in-law. They were the only ones who had remained faithful to God.

So, God commanded Noah to build an ark, that is, a large boat in which to save himself, his family and a pair of each of the animals all over the world. When it was finished, Noah gathered the animals and he and his family entered the ark and closed the door. Then it began to rain, and it rained for forty days and forty nights. The world was flooded, and everything was destroyed, but Noah and his family remained safe in the ark.

Today we also need a safe place. We need an ark too. I know that there are still many, many good people in the world. There are still many, many people who love our Lord and want to serve Him. They want to go to heaven and see God. They want to please God and do His will, and of course, so do we. That is why we come to Mass each Sunday.

Through our holy Catholic faith, we have learned many things. We have learned of the Father's love for us, a love so great that He sacrificed His only-begotten Son. We have also learned of how His Son, Jesus Christ, who suffered and died on the Cross that we might be saved, established His holy Catholic Church to preserve and pass on His teachings.

Through His Church, Jesus continues to teach and instruct us on what we must do and believe to be saved and to gain eternal life. Knowing these things gives direction and meaning and purpose to our lives. It also means we don't have to wander about aimlessly wondering about the meaning of life as many people do. It means we don't have to climb mountains in search of some sage to help us get in touch with our inner selves. It means we don't need shamans or gurus or yoga or reiki for inner healing. We also don't need pot or booze or drugs.

Why? We don't need these things because we have something much, much better. We have Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Lord and Savior and our brother who came to heal us and make us whole. He has the answers to all of life's most difficult questions. He came to forgive our sins and faults and failings. He came to show us the way to the Father. He is our way and our truth and our life, and that is why we don't need anything else but Him. He is all we need.

On the other hand, those who do not know Jesus Christ must look elsewhere for meaning and peace and happiness. They look for happiness in uncommitted sexual relationships or porn, and they take drugs to dull their pain.

Those who think more seek meaning in their work and in their careers or causes. Others seek after power or wealth craving for more and more things and stuff.

Many people today have turned in on themselves. In so doing, they have turned away from marriage and family and children. Instead of looking outward and finding love by seeking the good of others, they have turned in on themselves and only ask what's in it for me.

Now, those who do not have Jesus fall into two camps. First are those who have never known Him. They were raised in homes where the love of God and neighbor was not taught or practiced. You might call these people searchers.

In the other camp are those, many of whom are fairly well educated (or perhaps better, indoctrinated), who have intentionally rejected Jesus Christ. They are the modern pagans who refuse to be bound by laws of God. They have knowingly and deliberately rejected our Lord's teachings, especially when it comes to the goodness of love and life within true marriage.

These modern pagans have built a new pagan culture which now dominates our world, and here is the point everyone must understand. This pagan culture is toxic to our faith. Let me repeat. This pagan culture is toxic to our faith. That means if we do not take serious steps to live our faith and preserve our faith and pass on our faith, we will lose our faith, and we will be absorbed by the pagan culture which surrounds us.

Now if you don't believe me, if you want evidence, just think about your own families and friends and neighbors. Think about how many of them have stopped practicing their faith. Think about how many of them were raised Catholic but are now living like pagans. Who essentially are pagans. We cannot and must not join them. We cannot throw in the towel just because everyone else is doing so, and that brings me back to our parish ark.

To defend ourselves from this toxic pagan culture, just like Noah, we have built our parish arks. We have done so to support each other as we live out our holy Catholic faith. In these arks, we are sharing our joy in Christ with each other. We are promoting truth and goodness and beauty. We are also fostering a sense of unity which helps to overcome the sense of isolation many people of faith feel today.

You know, we are in a war. We are in a spiritual battle for souls, and this battle, this war is intensifying. Furthermore, none of us has the luxury to sit it out, to sit on the sidelines and just watch. We are all participants whether we like it or not. The only real question is whose side will we be on.

All of this reminds me of what Joshua said to the Israelites long ago. They were in much the same situation as we are today. They too had to decide what side to take, what side to be on. So, Joshua said to them,

“Choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD (Jos 24:15).”

I would say essentially the same thing to you today. Choose whom you will serve. The god of darkness, the evil one who hates love and life and goodness and beauty. Or, the one true God who offers to us a cross but who rewards those who love and serve Him with eternal life.

If you choose to follow God in this pagan world, you will need help, and that's where our parish arks come in. They offer two things in particular.

First there is Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. We all need to spend time with God. Why not do so in Church? Come to Adoration. Yes, all of us are pretty booked up. We all have schedules we follow. How hard would it be to change them just a bit and set aside an hour a week or a half hour or even fifteen or twenty minutes to come and pray before the Lord?

Here I especially want to speak to you men. We do things for God, for our families, for our communities. We find satisfaction in that. But we also need to spend time with those we love. Talking to God on the deer stand once a year isn't enough. We need God's help to do what's right and to resist temptations, especially all the porn that is out there. We need His wisdom and guidance to do the right thing. We will get that when we take time to listen to God in prayer.

The second thing our parish arks have is our small groups. Between the two parishes, we have fourteen of them. Some meet once a month and others once a week. Some meet in mornings and some in the evenings. Find one that works for you and try it out for Lent. They are all listed in the bulletin. Here I want ask for a volunteer couple to lead a group for middle-aged couples. If you feel God is calling you to help here, please let me know.

Our small groups offer a place where you can gather with others for prayer, study and fellowship. They especially help us see we are not alone and that there are many others who share our faith and love in Jesus.

So why not join one? You don't have to be an expert on the faith. You don't have to do anything or bring anything. All you have to do is come. Some folks just stay for the meeting whereas others hang around after and visit.

So, as Lent approaches, it's good for us to think about changes we can make in our lives to help us grow closer to God and to strengthen our faith. So please think about and pray about going to Adoration and about joining a small group, and then give it a try. Amen.