

Homily of Sunday, September 6, 2009 Rev. Arthur J. La Baff, Pastor

*He put his finger into the man's ears
and, spitting, touched his tongue;
then he looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him,
Ephphatha"— that is, "Be opened!"*

*And immediately the man's ears were opened,
his speech impediment was removed,
and he spoke plainly.*

He knew what had happened to him. — (Sunday Gospel, St. Mark)

Would that Jesus was here today to try to explain what is happening to our parish and parish life. Well he isn't and this poor tool will have to suffice because it is my position as pastor to try and help you understand what is happening.

We have tried through the past many months to help you understand what was coming and what is happening in our church, our diocese and our parish, as well as in our country. It has been a challenge but we have tried through the bulletin, letters and announcements in church, to tell you what the future held for us as a parish community.

I am sure that many of you are aware of the pastoral changes that have been made this past week. We are witnessing the emergence of new models of pastoral care and leadership. With nearly half of U.S. parishes and missions sharing their pastor with another parish or mission, multi parish pastoring is the most common solution to the shortage of priests in the United States, that is the sharing of one pastor with two or more different parishes at one time.

Moving from the traditional model of "one Priest, one parish" to the model of pastoring multiple parishes means CHANGE, not only for those in ministry, but also for those with whom they minister. Change is inevitable – we all know that. How we handle those changes will, to a large extent, determine how well we continue to grow as Christ's church in this place, at this time and with the people of God here at St. Patrick's.

The work of the Linkage Committee composed of representatives from St Patrick's and St Anthony's has been crucial - extremely important. We have met for several months to identify issues that linkage would present. This includes a new mass schedule (in the bulletin this weekend - effective the first weekend of October).

St. Anthony's and St Patrick's will be LINKED as of September 30th. LINKED means two or more parishes sharing a pastor. Father Robinson will be the pastor.

Deacon Kevin Mastellon will be the Parish Life Coordinator of St. Patrick's. This may be a new term and concept for many of you. This means that he is entrusted with the day to day pastoral care of the parish. He is appointed by the Bishop and is under the bishop's authority (or in our case the Diocesan Administrator). His role will be to do everything that a pastor does except the sacramental role reserved to priests.

Father Robinson is appointed by the bishop (Diocesan Administrator) to supervise and collaborate with the Parish Life Coordinator (Deacon Kevin) in carrying-out his responsibility as Parish Life Coordinator.

Every parish in Jefferson Deanery has already been affected by the shortage of priests from the year 2000 to today. We are the last to be affected. We have fewer priests and their age is rising. A pastor past 75 has retired and another resigned his parish, we are sorrowfully aware of Father Soucey's death and this week the death of a classmate of his, Father Bleaux. Our priests are ageing (But I hasten to add with great dignity). There are declining priestly vocations (Even with increased vocations as we are starting to see).

When we hear that parishes are to be linked there are challenges that effect parishioners and questions raised. These comments were mentioned in the letter that we mailed to all parishioners recently: When will we have Mass // Where will Mass be // What happens when Father is at the other parish and on and on // Will our parish close?

The Linkage Committee has been meeting and has worked wonderfully together. We have arrived at a new Mass schedule beginning in October and this is in the parish bulletin this week. Minutes of the Linkage Committee are also in the bulletin with a wonderful heart felt statement entitled: DON'T KILL YOUR PASTOR - it sounds silly but it is very serious statement. Please read it.

There are many challenges that we face and many blessings to be received. Your continued cooperation is essential to the well-being and growth of St. Patrick's Parish.

I am asking that you take home and read the CATHOLIC UPDATE inserted in your bulletin. It is entitled: PARISH MINISTRY TODAY ----- WE'RE ALL IN IT TOGETHER. The number of Catholics is flourishing in unprecedented numbers and in wonderful way. We are all being called to a deeper understanding of what our BAPTISM means to our Christian vocation. Our baptism calls and empowers us ALL to ministry in the church. We must come to an understanding of lay church ministry. We are so fortunate to have two ordained Permanent Deacons and 28 active Commissioned Lay Ministers in the parish and more on the way. Also we need to realize that each person is responsible for our parish and its life. We

cannot leave it to someone else. You have to step forward and be counted; just setting in the pew week after week will not ensure the continence of our parish.

The Holy Spirit is leading us and God is certainly in charge of the Church. There are new horizons and we need a major reorientation in our thinking about Ministry, about living our faith. We can not just set back and leave it to someone else.

The baptized are called to share in the Church's mission through mutual service, through a life of worship and through witness to the gospel by holiness of life, a daily struggle for each one of us.

Most of us are called to live our Christian life in the world by being and becoming more Christ like amidst the pressing demands of marriage, family, single life, school and workplace.

In all these ways and more, the gift of the Christian people for witness, worship and service are to be shared for the greater glory of God in this community of faith, hope and love.

Your history is rich, your dedication to the church is outstanding, your faith is strong, and your love for God, church, fellow parishioners is firm and it will grow. Stand with Father Robinson and Deacon Kevin who will lead this parish to even greater days than have been witnessed in the past.

You are Called, Chosen and Baptized. You are the People of God.

*Look back and thank God.
Look forward and trust God.
Look around and serve God.
Look within and find God.
God closes doors no man can open and
God opens doors no man can close.*

Thus says the LORD:

*Say to those whose hearts are frightened:
Be strong, fear not!
Here is your God,
He comes with vindication;
with divine recompense
He comes to save you.*

I will have more to say to you before I leave --- in the next few weeks.