



St. Rita

catholic community

A Letter From Our Pastoral Administrator

No Poor Among You: A Biblical Reflection on Sharing

Dear Parishioners,

When the Hebrews entered the Promised Land, God demanded they live lives worthy of the gifts they received, setting before them an ideal and an ethics to be pursued and practiced, of solidarity, communion and peace.

Speaking to Israel, God said, "But there will be no poor among you" (Dt. 15:4). That's because the way God acted toward them was how they were to act toward each other. God liberated the Hebrews, so they were to liberate each other. The widow and the orphan were to be looked after, for instance, because God cared for orphaned Israel. The stranger was to be cared for, as well, because Israel was once also a stranger in Egypt (Ex. 22:21-24). And it was an ethics of some complexity. Every seven years, the people of Israel were to inaugurate a "solemn rest for the land," and every 49 years they were to forgive

debt and return property and people to their God-given families (Lev. 25:1-10).

God's liberation of Israel gave meaning to the whole of the economics of Israel. At the very heart of Israel's fiscal being was the memory of God's generous act: "If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself...you shall support him...Take no interest or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you...I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Lev. 25:35-38). Memory of God's liberation touched everything, especially economics. God gave Israel everything they possessed, and so they were to do likewise for each other in lives of sharing.

The economics of Israel was founded on the understanding of gift-giving, on the understanding that since God gave gifts, his people should too. Israel was a covenant

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family practiced in the constant sharing of God's gifts. For Israel, giving and sharing were not extraneous charitable acts done only after consideration. Rather, it was existential; to be a Hebrew was to share. Not sharing was to cease being a Hebrew; it was to be like "all the nations" (1 Sam. 8:5), a murderer like Cain (Gen. 4:1-16) and a thief like Ahab (1 Kings 21:1-7); it was to become "a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth" (Jer. 34:17). Israel was a special people, or at least they were supposed to

be. They were supposed to live differently. They were to share.

And this call to be a gift-giving family is equally present in the New Testament. It is not insignificant that Jesus began his ministry in Luke's Gospel saying, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor" (Lk. 4:18). Starkly, Jesus spoke of responsibility of the rich to be a blessing to the poor (Lk. 6:20-26). He identified himself with the poor and demanded his disciples love and serve him by serving the poor, whom he called the "least of these my brothers" (Mt. 25:40).

Jesus called together a community of men and women, rich and poor united by mutual acts of love. The rich were to love the poor by means of material assistance. The poor were to love the rich by means of friendship and prayer, friendships that would eventually mean everything in heaven. It's what Jesus meant by saying, "make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth" (Lk. 16:9), and it's what he meant in telling the story of the rich man and Lazarus, in that harrowing parable. "Send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue," the rich man begged Abraham in torment. Which request was answered thus: "Son," Abraham replied, "remember that you in your lifetime received your good things...between us and you a great chasm has been fixed" (Lk. 16:24-26). Which is the moral: that in the kingdom there is a relationship between rich and poor that matters, and that it's important we recognize it on this side of heaven. The point Jesus is making is that if we insist on keeping our distance from the poor in this life, the we might just experience that

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distance after this life too, but differently and not in a way we'd like.

As in the Old Testament, Jesus called together a community of gift-giving and sharing. As Israel was called to be a covenant family, so too did Jesus call the Church. And just as Israel was called to share, so too is the Church. To be a Hebrew was to share. The same is true for Christians.

We see this in Acts. Echoing Deuteronomy almost verbatim, Luke says of the early Church that there "was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:34). What poor readers mistakenly refer to as the communism or socialism of the early Church is nothing more than the covenant ethics of the Old Testament redeemed and renewed in the New Testament. Just as God liberated Israel from Egypt, so Christ liberated the whole of humanity. He did this so that the Church could live together as a covenant family in peace and harmony. And like Israel, living this covenant was ineluctably economic.

According to Paul, we are to supply each other's needs so "that there may be equality" (2 Cor. 8:14). Again, don't think socialism or communism, instead, think communion and charity. That is, our sharing is meant to build up

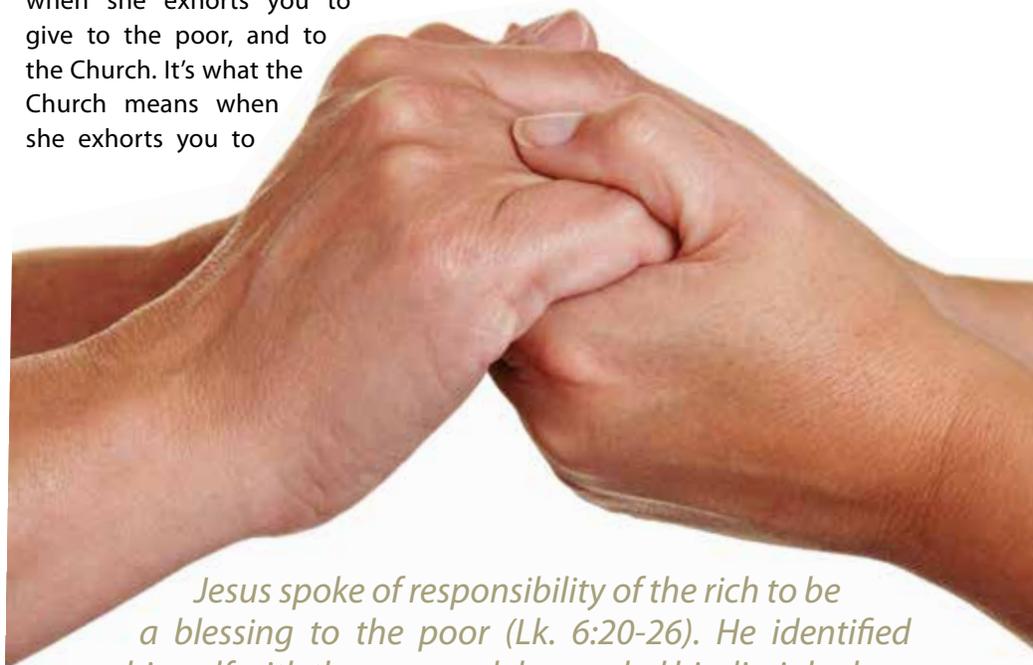
the people of God as a genuine fellowship, a genuine Church of people who freely love. There are, of course, many reasons people refuse to give, but none of them are biblical, all of them at some level loveless. The biblical ideal is that we give as much as we love, and when our love shows itself in giving, then we have what the New Testament understands by the word "Church," a community that finally loves God and neighbor in more than just words.

This is what the Church means when she exhorts you to give to the poor, and to the Church. It's what the Church means when she exhorts you to

live lives of stewardship and giving. It's why you should give to St. Rita if you claim her membership, for the sake of the growth of Christ's covenant family. It's why giving is both an obligation and an invitation to a deeper and more biblical life in Christ. And it's why not giving is a spiritual problem, whether you acknowledge it thus or not.

pax,

Fr. Joshua



Jesus spoke of responsibility of the rich to be a blessing to the poor (Lk. 6:20-26). He identified himself with the poor and demanded his disciples love and serve him by serving the poor, whom he called the "least of these my brothers" (Mt. 25:40).

Teaching Children the Bu

No matter what age you are, there is always something new to learn about our faith! It's never too early to start building a strong faith foundation so that our children can understand what it means to be Catholic. Here at St. Rita, our Children's Faith Formation and RCIA Adapted for Children (commonly called RCIC) programs teach children the building blocks of what we believe, and help them to grow on their faith journey.

"There is no right or wrong time to come into the Church – whatever journey your family is on, we're here to help you on that journey," says Director of Children's Faith Formation Susan Sheetz. "We have age-appropriate classes for children at all stages of the journey. We walk with the parents

– the parents are the primary catechists of their children, so we are here to support you. This is a dialogue, and we begin that dialogue in class. When the parents pick the child up and ask them what they did and talk to them, they continue that dialogue at home. The following week, we continue to build on the conversation."

The Children's Faith Formation program is designed to teach children the "building blocks" of the Catholic faith, and to continue to build on that foundation over the years.

"We first teach them what the Church is all about – why we're Catholic, what we do, why we do it," Susan says. "Then we take that theology and apply it to the sacraments. The following year, we

build on that by asking, 'What does that sacrament mean in your life now?' They learn more and more each year, and they are able to apply what they learn to their lives."

Traditional Faith Formation for children in kindergarten through sixth grade, Youth Ministry for seventh-graders, and RCIC for children and teens of all ages all meet on the same day and time. The RCIC program is designed for children who, for various reasons, are receiving their Sacraments of Initiation at different ages or in a different order than what is usually done in our diocese.

"The main difference between RCIC and our Children's Faith Formation classes is that the books we use are age-appropriate," Susan says. "The publisher we use has come up with a lovely program for older children. In RCIC, just like in faith formation, the children are forming their own Christian communities. They are with the same children for two years, and they get to know each other and help one another. We have also been blessed with catechists who understand their needs and help them, as well."

This upcoming holiday season, the Faith Formation program has created two opportunities to help children to put their faith into

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– Susan Sheetz, Director of Children's Faith Formation

Building Blocks of Our Faith

action. On Nov. 12, fifth, sixth and seventh-graders participated in the Social Justice Sunday event. The event featured two speakers – Director of Faith Formation Joshua Clemmons, and Associate Director of Catholic Charities Nubia Torres.

“We talk about loving your neighbor and serving the greater community, and about how our faith isn’t just about sitting at a desk, reading out of a book,” Susan says. “We want them to live out their Catholic faith. With the recent tragedies and hurricanes, it’s important for them to know what part they can play, even at their age. We want to give them the tools to get involved and learn about things like Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Services.”

Throughout Advent, the Faith Formation program also teams up with the St. Vincent de Paul Society for the Christmas Toy Drive.

“We have been working with St. Vincent de Paul for the Toy Drive since 2009,” Susan says. “It serves our parish outreach client families. The children donate toys, and St. Vincent de Paul opens up a store where parents can come in and pick out some items for their children for Christmas. We have a station where people will wrap the gifts for them, and this allows them to have a nice Christmas with gifts.”

The primary goal of our Children’s Faith Formation program is for the children to understand God’s unconditional, all-encompassing love. This love is the root from which their faith will continue to grow and flourish.

“We just want the children to truly understand that Jesus loves them, and for them to understand that, they need to see that love in their catechists,” Susan says. “Our faith calls us to love someone that we don’t see – that’s why we call it faith, because you don’t see, but you believe. When a catechist shows that love to a child, they get it – ‘They have been patient with me, they have been kind to me, and that is how Jesus loves me.’ If we can do that, then we have done our job. When a catechist comes in excited about their faith, it’s a fire that catches with the kids.”

If you would like to learn how to get involved as a volunteer, or if you have questions about these programs, please contact Susan Sheetz at 972-934-8388.



Women of the Word: A “Safe, Loving Place” to Share in Formation and Fellowship

So, are you looking for a recipe for a phenomenal Bible study? Try authentic Catholic spiritual writings to be pondered over, sincere friendships to be made, and amazing discussions to share. Sprinkle in some prayer and the test of time, and you’ve got quite the mix.

“I joined the Women of the Word study when it first started over 17 years ago,” says Jessica Johnston. “The friendships I have made through it have been trustworthy and spiritual. We don’t judge one another, and that is important. It is a safe, loving place to share your thoughts with the others and think about how the lessons we study apply to our lives.”

The Women of the Word study meets on Wednesdays from 9:15 to 11 a.m. from September through May in the Staubach Family Wing, in Room D248.

Since its foundation, Eumabel Colberg has facilitated the group, prayerfully selecting the materials for study. Recently, they covered *Queen of Heaven: Mary’s Battle for You* by St. Benedict Press, in honor of

the 100th anniversary of Our Blessed Mother’s apparition at Fatima.

“Eumabel is such a treasure,” Jessica says. “We feel so blessed to have her as our leader. She has a deep knowledge and understanding of the Bible and of a variety of Catholic resources. She spends so much time doing research and preparing our lessons.”

Impressively, Eumabel works hard to coordinate the study’s readings with the liturgical celebrations of Mother Church.

“I really try to match the annual spiritual theme of the universal Church to what we are studying, using resources from reputable Catholic publishers,” Eumabel says. “If there is something the Holy Father wants the Church to focus on, I try to find a book that will help us deepen that particular aspect of our faith. For example, last year, for the Year of Mercy, we did a study on Luke, the ‘Gospel of Mercy.’ Sometimes, our parish priest will ask us to study a certain topic as well.”

By doing so, Women of the Word helps its participants unite

their hearts to those of other Catholics all around the world.

“We have all benefited from this,” Jessica says. “It enhances our weekly Mass experience, and our knowledge of the faith has become much more profound. Everything we learn goes hand-in-hand with the universal Church.”

Although the formal study usually wraps up in the spring, most members are so enthusiastic about the spiritual journey that they are on, that they don’t want to stop learning. They usually read a book in early summer, as well, and meet once or twice a week in June to discuss it.

Further, Women of the Word members pray for each other’s intentions in a meaningful way, and cherish one another’s presence at occasional fellowship events.

Throughout the year, they also complete one or two community service projects. For example, around Christmastime, they have a brunch, during which they put together bags for the elderly. In addition, they volunteer to help at our parish garage sale together.

If you would like more information about this beautiful study of God’s Word, please contact Eumabel Colberg at 972-788-2843.

Changes to Parish Sound System Will Improve Mass Experience

If you have been struggling with hearing or understanding words spoken during Mass, our Sound System Committee is well aware, and is working right now to fix this ongoing problem.

Mike Leshner, Chair of our Pastoral Council, has put together the Sound System Committee, which is waiting the results of an acoustics evaluation that was done in October as part of Phase 1 of the project. In addition to Mike, the members are Al Calabrese, Deacon Denis Corbin, Jerry Hayes, Robert McLaughlin, Steve Niles, Kevin Powers, Matt Glass, and Andrew Pena.

"We had an expert acoustician come in one weekend and he

worked all day doing tests in the church," Mike says. "He attended Mass Saturday and Sunday. Then, he will create a 3D model to evaluate the acoustics in the church. From there, he'll send an evaluation of our existing system and make recommendations of what he'd do to improve it. We'll probably get it before Thanksgiving."

Once the evaluation comes through and passes muster, the committee then will decide if the project will go forward. If that takes place, the project will enter Phase 2, obtaining bids for equipment and installation.

"It will probably be December or January before we actually

pick the company we would want," Mike says. "The installation probably won't be done until April or May. I think we'll be receiving a whole new speaker system and rewiring the church. Of course, we have to get diocesan approval, and that will take time. So I don't expect the project to be done until the second quarter of 2018."

The current speaker system was installed about 30 years ago, with the electronics that drive it being 10 years old. The speakers are placed in the middle of our circular lights, with the speakers aimed toward the floor.

"What happens when someone speaks at the altar, you're listening to sound coming from above you," Mike says. "The sound comes down in a conical shape, and it sounds different if you are right under it or adjacent to that cone, or if you are sitting or standing. We've known the architectural design of our church was excellent for music. Our choir does not reinforce their sound. The actual electronics behind the speakers are about eight to nine years old. That doesn't sound bad, but the technology is old."

The firm that is performing the evaluation was found after a national search.

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Weekday Masses

*Monday-Friday, 6:25 a.m. & 5:30 p.m.
Wednesday & Friday (Only when School
is in session), 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.*

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“It’s a firm out of Milwaukee, and they recently re-did a neighboring church,” Mike says. “We wanted someone whose specialty is places of worship. We wanted someone to work with the design of a church.”

The goal is to replace the speaker system and the electronics supporting it.

“We’ll get new speakers and electronics, new mics for the lectors and priest at the altar,” Mike says. “The system now is outdated for various reasons. The ability to hear needs to be much improved.”

The new system, once it is installed, will make a great difference in how we are able to participate in Mass.

“When you go to church, hearing good music is great, but if you can’t hear the priest in terms of his homily, or the Scriptures, and you can’t understand what is being said from the altar, you’re having a suboptimal spiritual experience,” Mike says. “We really want the people to hear and understand so they can reflect and get a good spiritual message. And now, not everyone can do it. Another aspect is that at the beginning of each service, we have someone talk about the ministries we have. We call it the ‘Spotlight.’ We have volunteers speak and they go through their projects, and if they can’t be heard, it’s not a ‘Spotlight.’ This will enable the ‘Spotlight’ to be more effective.”

Although funds have been prioritized for this project, this means that other planned projects will be delayed. To help alleviate the project’s costs, the Committee is seeking donations. If you would like to make a contribution, please contact Mike Leshner at mlesher@vt.edu, or Deacon Denis Corbin at dcorbin@stritaparish.net.