

Today in our bulletins, you will find the first of several documents on the Family of Parishes Info Series. These are being circulated to help us understand the process of implementing the Family of Parishes in our diocese.

Today's document deals with our diocese as *mission oriented*; the mission to evangelize our world today. As we have talked about in our message series over the last year, we are called to evangelize, to be growing disciples who are growing other disciples. This is the vision of our diocese to be accomplished through these parish families. As the weeks go on, there will be more information on the whole process, so stay tuned.

And so today is our second week in our series Half-Truths. Our world is full of half-truths; truths that are kind of right, but not completely.

A half-truth is a statement that includes some element of truth but in leaving out the rest of the truth it brings about a deception.

Last week Fr Gary talked about the half-truth that there are many ways to God.

He said that what is often meant by that statement is that there are many ways to experience God and that many religions can offer spiritual insights. That is true. But the whole truth is that there is only one way to God and that is through the person of Jesus Christ.

Here is the thing, in saying that Jesus is the only way to God, we are *not* saying that we are superior, but that Jesus is superior, that he has a special relationship with God because he is the Son of God.

I invite you to read more on Fr Gary's homily on this topic. It is so beautifully done and you can find it at [gslakeshore.com](http://gslakeshore.com). You can find our other homilies in this series as well.

Today is also the great feast of Pentecost, which is the birth of the Church. Today we commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles in a profound and life-changing way.

This gift of the Holy Spirit is the beginning of the Church's powerful influence on the history of the world as we know it today.

And so with that in mind, I want to talk about the half truth that says: "I don't need the Church to have a relationship with God or to be a good person".

This statement is very prevalent in our culture today. More and more people are giving up on Church. Some give up on Church because they see hypocrisy.

Others give up on Church because they think they can experience God better on their own. Still others give up on Church because of the failures of some of its leaders.

We often hear: "Faith is personal. I have a relationship with God on my own. I can commune with God in nature. I don't need to go to church to be holy." And there is truth to all of those statements.

Yes, it's important to have a personal relationship with Jesus. Yes, we experience God in nature.

And yes, there have been leaders in the church who have failed and done things completely wrong – that fact is irrefutable. But those statements don't take into account the whole truth.

Our church has a rich history throughout the last two thousand years of remarkable achievements.

These include the building of hospitals across the world to support those who suffer. Other accomplishments include the building of schools and the founding of many, many universities. The church has been a champion of human rights throughout its history and has stood strong against the many injustices that have plagued our world.

The church and its many servants have continued to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit to bring souls to Christ.

Today, I want to talk about why we continue to need the Church in our world today; why belonging and committing to a local Church is vital to a relationship with God and is vital to our spiritual growth.

Some of you may be in church for the first time in a long time, or the first time ever. My hope is that after today, you will consider that coming to Church regularly is a worthwhile investment of your time.

We all need encouragement, and here is where I've found my encouragement.

There are many reasons why we need the Church. For instance: here is where we break open the Word of God and discover how it relates to our lives today.

Here is where we celebrate the sacraments of the Church, like Reconciliation, and the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of our whole faith.

We worship here in community and we draw strength from each other.

Today, I'd like to explore three reasons in particular why we need the Church in our lives today.

The first reason is to help us understand and use our spiritual gifts. In Corinthians today Paul tells us:

*<sup>4</sup>Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup>and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup>and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. <sup>7</sup>To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

1 Corinthians 12: 4 - 7

Paul tells us that everyone who is in the Church has some kind of spiritual gift. We discover these gifts by living in community and through others, who often see the gifts in ourselves that we cannot see.

In my life, being a deacon was the farthest thing from my mind until deacon Roy tapped me on the shoulder one Sunday and encouraged me to think about it. We all need to encourage each other by recognizing each others' gifts.

God has a plan for each of us and how we can bring about his Kingdom in our world today; and the way to do that is by belonging and serving in some way in the Church.

Those of you here who serve in some type of ministry have experienced how God works in us and through us. We are given the grace we need to accomplish the work He has given us to do, in spite of our brokenness and our inabilities.

In cooperating with God's plan we come to know His presence in a profound way, a way that we may never have experienced before.

And so the first reason is to help us understand and use our spiritual gifts.

The second reason we need the Church is because we need to benefit from the gifts of the other members.

Our God given gifts are not meant for us... they are meant for others, for the common good, and in turn, the gifts of the community are meant for each of us. We hear again from Paul:

*<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—...*

1 Corinthians 12: 12 - 13

He later goes on to explain that the different parts of the body need each other. We need our eyes to see where we're going and we need our feet to get us there.

God's grace abounds in the faith and the gifts of other believers. And we all need to be influenced by these gifts. We are not sufficient by ourselves. We are not meant to do life alone. We are meant to do life in community with others.

Isn't it life-giving to have joyful people who greet us at the doors each Sunday? Isn't it encouraging to see people sacrifice their time each week to teach our children in Sunday School?

Isn't it life-giving to see parishioners sharing a coffee in our cafe? Isn't it encouraging to see parishioners who come each week, every week, regardless of the challenges that they face in their lives.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS ALIVE IN THE CHURCH AND CONTINUES TO ANIMATE ITS ACTIONS IN OUR WORLD TODAY..... THIS IS SOMETHING PROFOUND AND MIRACULOUS; SOMETHING THAT WE ALL NEED TO BE A PART OF!

You've probably heard that geese can fly further when they fly in V formation, as opposed to flying on their own. Likewise, in receiving the spiritual giftedness of others we are able to accomplish so much more than we could by ourselves.

And so the second reason the church is so important in our lives today is the spiritual support we receive from each other.

To discover the third reason, we need to look at our reading from Acts of the Apostles:

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.<sup>2</sup> And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability.*

Acts 2: 2 – 4

The Holy Spirit came to them as they were gathered as a community.

And then as the disciples proclaimed the word of God, the Jews of Jerusalem, who were of many different nationalities were able to hear the disciples in their own language. They couldn't understand how the disciples could speak in so many different tongues.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit always brings unity in spite of any obstacle, language or otherwise! While human brokenness separates and causes disunity, the Holy Spirit brings unity.

And so the third reason why the Church is so important today is to help us be a part of God's vision for the world. **The Church is the visible sign that God invites everyone, everyone, into a relationship with him.**

God calls all people to be a part of his family, no matter who they are and the Church is to be a reminder that God is drawing all people to himself. We need the Church to fulfill that mission.

One of the things that is so beautiful about our faith community is that it brings together many diverse people who might never have met under different circumstances, and we are then able to learn and grow from each other.

Can we do a better job of reaching out to others? Of course we can, but we can continue to be a welcoming community and always strive to improve and do better.

For those of you who may be searching for a faith community, I urge you to commit to a specific Church. We all need the support of a community of believers.

Making a commitment to a specific faith community is a sign of spiritual maturity.

GK Chesterton once said, "Rome was not loved because it was great. It was great because it was loved."

A Church community becomes great because people love it and sacrifice for it. The health of our Church, of our parish, depends upon people who love this community.

They love this faith community right here in Lakeshore and accept it. They love our faith community despite its limitations, despite some of the difficult people in it and despite the brokenness of all its members.

And so I urge those of you who are searching; to really commit to a Church community. Who knows, maybe our faith community will be the one you choose.

And for the rest of us, invite others to join us, so they can be a part of something that will change their lives forever.

Come Holy Spirit and renew our faith community. May we be your welcoming presence to all who

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