

THE PASTOR'S POINTS- April 29, 2018

I've been here a little over a month now, and I thought I would share some initial impressions. First off, THANK YOU – I know that this has been a challenging time for many of you, and I want to thank you for hanging in there with the reality of the Catholic Church – we are ALL broken, stumbling, and trying to find our way. This includes the folks in the pews and those who try to lead the folks in the pews. So I join this stumbling group of pilgrims somewhere mid-journey, hoping that our years together might be pleasing to God and helpful to one another. You and God will have to be the ultimate judges of that. I pray it might be so. (A side note to that – I pray a rosary for the parish every day and I've been doing that since the day I found out I was coming here. I'm still praying a rosary for All Saints in Hampstead every day, asking God to give them a pastor who will love them and serve them well. Which is what we all want, right? Good relationships that help one another to grow in the love of Christ.)

One of the first thing I noticed when I walked onto the property is HOW BEAUTIFUL it is! The landscape is the most beautiful Catholic Church property I've ever seen! Really! KUDOS KUDOS KUDOS to all of you for the gentle care for Mother Earth on these few acres where you have erected a house of worship. All of you who contribute to those efforts in any way should feel justifiably proud. What a great first impression it makes to all of our guests – and what a happy place of landing for those of us who come here regularly. I'm loving watching all of these spring things surprise me with their colors and textures.

And the other thing that I am deeply appreciating is worshiping in a church building once again. The parish of All Saints prays in a multi-purpose building every Sunday. It's a pretty space, but by its very nature does not have the same 'feel' as a designed-for-worship church building does. Also, in the summer, some of you have worshiped at the outdoor pavilion masses held at Surf City. That has its own unique beauty, but again, it's not the same as a church.

I came upon this, which articulates more poetically than I can, something of what I'm experiencing. I'm adapting some of his text.....

"When I look back on my life, the parts that matter and sustain me, all I see is a series of chapels/churches. They may be old or young, cracked brown or open space; they may be design-specific or afterthoughts, hidden corners of a city or deserted spaces in the forest. They are as variable as people. But like people, they have a stillness at the core of them which makes all discussion of high and low, East and West, you and me dissolve. Bells toll and toll and I lose all sense of whether they are chiming within me or without.

"The first time I was asked to enter a New York office building – for a job interview – I gathered myself, in all senses, in St. Patrick's, and knew that it would put everything I was about to face (a company, a new life, my twittering ambitions) into place. It was the frame that gave everything else definition. Ever since, I've made it my practice to step into that great thronged space whenever I return to the city, to remind myself of what is real, what is lasting, before giving myself to everything that isn't. A chapel/church is the biggest immensity we face in our daily lives, unless we live in a desert or in the vicinity of the Grand Canyon. A chapel/church is

the deepest silence we can absorb, unless we stay in a cloister. A chapel/church is where we allow ourselves to be broken open as if we were children again.....

“So much of our time is spent running from ourselves, or hiding from the world; a chapel/church brings us back to the source, in ourselves and in the larger sense of self—as if there were a difference. Look around you. Occasional figures are exploring their separate silences; the rich and the poor are hard to tell apart, with heads bowed. Light is diffused and general; when you hear voices, they are joined in a chorus or reading from a holy book. The space at the heart of a chapel/church is empty, and that emptiness is prayer and surrender.

“A chapel/church is where you can hear something beating below your heart. We’ve always needed them, howsoever confused or contradictory we may be in the way we define our religious affiliations; we’ve always had to have quietness and stillness to undertake journeys into battle, or just the tumult of the world. How can we act in the world, if we haven’t had the time and chance to find out who we are and what the world and action might be? (adapted from Brian Doyle, Editor, A SENSE OF WONDER, p. 168-171)

It’s a blessing for me to be back in a beautiful space. And there’s a funny story about this particular space. Many of you who were here when the church was built will remember Jean Finnerty (now Newberry). She is a member of All Saints in Hampstead. And just like when she was here, she is one of the pillars of that community. She called me when she heard the news and said: “You will love it there! It’s a great community – and a beautiful new church – I was on the building committee – it seats almost 1100.” Very typical of Jean, she was doing whatever she could to smooth my way here – and I know she reached out to some of you and told you a bunch of lies about how nice I was! I absolved her for those!

Thanks for your patience as I try to figure out how I might best join you in serving Christ in this community, and let us pray for one another.