

Yesterday we celebrated as a diocese the ordination of two men to the priesthood, Fr. Michael Thomas Grady and Fr. Arthur Conor Kunath. I say celebrate as a diocese because this is a joyful time for all of us in the local church under Bishop Foys. We are all better because we have added to the number of priests which benefits us all.

Sadly, we also mourn as a nation the loss of twelve individuals in the Virginia Beach shootings on Friday. I say we mourn as a nation because we all feel the impact of this loss. We are reminded of losses similar to this that have impacted our lives, such as a fatal car accident, suicides, abortion, 9/11, Katrina, the stream of tornadoes that recently stretched across the Midwest. We suffer together at these great tragedies.

We also celebrate and suffer individually. Each of us celebrates our own birthdays or suffer when we experience the loss of a loved one.

Today we celebrate the Ascension; Christ rising to Heaven and taking His place at the right hand of God. This takes place during the larger celebration of Easter. Yes, we are still celebrating Easter. Remember that Lent lasts for 40 days. We mourn our failings and commit to corporal works of mercy as a penance. Easter lasts 50 days. From His Resurrection to Pentecost, we shout Alleluia! We celebrate liturgically by reading scriptures from the Acts of the Apostles during those days Jesus remained with them after His resurrection. We celebrate Easter Day as an octave, an eight-day-long day. We celebrate Easter right up to Pentecost, next Sunday, when the Spirit of God rains down on the Apostles and inspires them to preach the Good News of Jesus with authority, strength and perseverance. This is a time to celebrate as the Family we all are in the Body of Christ.

That's what God made us to be; we are social creatures meant to live with and love one another, to celebrate together, to mourn together. That is why we have the liturgical seasons; in the fall, we celebrate Advent, a time to prepare together for the coming of Christ. We celebrate Christmas, a time to rejoice together in God incarnate, one among us. We celebrate Lent and Easter together. We even celebrate the individual feasts of the Saints who have gone before us to the glory of heaven.

Yesterday, we celebrated the feast of St. Justin, a martyr in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. When asked by the prefect in Rome if he thought that by dying he would enter heaven, Justin said, "I don't think, I know." He died with great joy knowing exactly where he was going. We, too, celebrate Justin's victory.

The Mass is the greatest liturgical prayer of the church. The Liturgy of the Hours is the second greatest prayer. Just as the liturgical seasons dictate the elements of the Mass, the liturgical seasons also dictate the emphasis of Liturgy of the Hours. Each day is focused on a particular sentiment; we rejoice together and we mourn together. During the Christmas and Easter Seasons, we say Alleluia after each antiphon. During Advent and Lent, we do not. On Fridays, we typically cry out to God for mercy while on Sundays we rejoice in His resurrection.

We do these together as a family. This is why the clergy are required to pray the Liturgy of the Hours every day and the laity are highly encouraged to do so as well. This is the prayer of the people. The word Liturgy means in Greek Work of the People, but the intention is that it is an activity by the people in union with God. Again, it is meant to be performed together. We gather and celebrate Mass together. Mass is not an event performed by the priest as we sit idly by; we actively participate together, we pray along with the priest together, we actively listen to the Word of God together, we come forward and receive the Body and Blood of Christ together. We do these things together.

This doesn't mean that our own individual sufferings and celebrations are any less important; we all suffer our own losses and we all celebrate our personal victories. But in the larger picture, we remember that we are all part of one family in the Body of Christ. We all are together in this thing call life. We all are on the same faith journey to heaven with the angels and saints. By suffering and celebrating together, we remain strong. I don't know about you, but when I suffer alone, when I'm only looking at myself, I struggle more. When I celebrate my victories alone, it's rather lonely.

It's when I align my sufferings and victories with Christ and with the family I have in the Body of Christ, that is when I am strong. We are stronger together.

Each day, as we go about our very busy lives, we try to remember others, our brothers and sisters in Christ. That means our neighbor, that guy in the car next to us at the light, the people we work with, the people we meet at the store or in line at the bank. We are all suffering and celebrating every day. And I don't know about you, but it seems like suffering is winning out. So let's suffer together. And let's celebrate together. We are all in this together, so let's help each other to the finish line so we can all be in heaven together.