

## Farewell Homily - St. Leonard's - Aug 22, 2010

What do you get when you cross two Joseph's, one Agnes, one Michael, one Alphonsus and our Lady together? You get a little baby. And that little baby's name is Leonard. Whenever a baby comes into a family it requires a lot of readjustment with everyone in the family. You and I are the parents of that little baby and there have been very joy-filled times, times of growth, new life and promise, and there has also been some sleepless nights, some concerns, rivers of tears and worry with our little baby... now three years old this past Pentecost. But none the less, we are the parents and our child is totally dependent upon our love, nurturing, support and care as it grows, matures and develops during this very vulnerable and critical period of its existence.

We have experienced a lot together in two short years. Highs and lows, joy and anger, times of both strength and uncertainty. We could borrow the first words from the book, **A Tale of Two Cities** by Charles Dickens, and sincerely say, "It was the best of times and it was the worst of times". As moms and dads know so well, changing diapers and comforting a crying child in the middle of the night is not always pleasant nor easy. So too here in our parish. But we have also seen moments when this little child has smiled and laughed, when it has reached out to a stranger, when it has begun to speak for the first time and mouth the words, I love you mommy. I need you daddy. And I guess that is where I am as I leave you. I see our little child with lots of potential. I see hope. I see promise. I see a desire in most people in our big faith family wanting to help nurture this little one and make sure that it grows into a healthy child of God filled with lots of faith, hope and love.

These past two years have seen a lot of change in our parish. We have seen the marriage of 2 CWLs into 1, 2 StVdePaul's into 1, a newly elected Parish Pastoral Council, a new Finance and Administration Committee, a new Pastoral Centre, and a new worship space that we have adapted so that all parishioners can feel comfortable in. Our baby Leonard is slowly growing and continues to need our love, support, compassion and care. We have gathered here to celebrate our Christian faith on many occasions. Sundays and weekdays, Christmas and Easter, Weddings and Funerals, Baptisms and Confirmations. God has visited us each and every time and continues to be the source and destiny of our lives.

I'll never forget this past year we celebrated the funeral of one of our parishioners. He was very devout and his faith was strong. I learned a great theological lesson from his little grandchild. A few days after the funeral his 4 year old grand-daughter and her mother were visiting grandpa's home. The little girl went up to grandpa's bedroom with her mother and grandmother. She was looking all around the room. Her grandpa had statues of St. Joseph, St. Theresa, St. Michael, St. Anthony, St. Francis, the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus on the Cross. A little bit put out and missing her grandfather, she looked at the statues and then at her mother and grandmother and said, "I suppose grandpa's up in heaven with all these guys!" Children are so wise and full of God's grace. I have been touched by the presence of our children at the 11am Mass, their breaking open God's Word, and their invasion of the sanctuary during collection time.

I learned so much on Tuesday nights with our Breaking Open of God's Word and the beautiful faith sharing which took place amongst us, young and old alike. I have been touched by those who serve our parish in ministries who generously offer their time and gifts with constancy and grace. Christmas, Easter, Special Celebrations and Funerals can be an extra effort for everyone who serves and all of you have been there during the quiet times and in the busy times. The servers, the extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, the Parish Choirs, the lectors, the sacristans, the hospitality ministers, the CWL and the KOC and the StVincent de Paul members for your faithful service to God and to our people.

To the Parish Pastoral Council and the Finance and Administration Committee, to John Angione and Jody Sutherland, thank you for offering yourselves to serve our parish in this important way. Leadership is very challenging during this time of uncertainty in our parish and our diocese, and all of you have been very open and diligent in moving forward with both faith and good judgement. My sincere prayers go out to each of you as our parish continues to discern God's Will in 2010 and in the years ahead.

To our Parish Staff and Team, it has been a genuine pleasure working with you these past two years. I cannot thank you enough for the many times that you have given me advice, helpful correction, encouragement, a good laugh, or a needed hug when necessary. Your professionalism, service and faithfulness to the people of our Parish is humbling. My sincere prayers and thanks to all of you during this time of transition as I leave and as Fr. Ray soon arrives.

To our Associate Pastor, Fr. Doug. When the bishop asked me two years ago to come to this parish he told me that you would be coming with me. I was delighted. When you first arrived and introduced yourself at the masses as a baby priest... a big baby... I knew it was going to be okay. It has not been easy these past two years especially as a newly ordained priest and you have handled things very well. You made me laugh a couple of months ago when you told me about what happened to you at the entrance of the church. A lady was coming in and she was all upset. She said to you, "Isn't it terrible that Fr. Paul is leaving the parish". You listened to her and tried to console her, and said to her, "Yes, he's leaving, but I'm still going to be here for another year". She looked at you and replied, "Well, we'll make the best of it". Best wishes to you Fr. Doug, as well as Deacon Leo and Viola, Marcy, Florence, Mary, Willena, Wilfred, Brian and Barbara as you welcome Fr. Ray to the St. Leonard's Staff and Team.

And finally to you, the good people of St. Leonards, I offer to you my sincere thanks for your faithfulness to God and our parish, in good times and in bad. You are God's Beloved People and He holds each and every one of you in the palm of His hands. Thank you for believing in the sun when it was cloudy. Thank you for offering words of peace in times of discord. Thank you for your prayerful presence when we gathered as church and throughout our community. Thank you for embracing hope in times of confusion. Thank you for sharing your strong Catholic Christian Faith yesterday, today and tomorrow, your commitment to charity and prayer, your work for peace and justice, and your staunch belief in resurrection and new life. The Kingdom of God is in your midst. It has grown each and every time that you and I have made a conscious choice to love and forgive. For me, after I arrived two years ago, I realized the giftedness of our parish and our potential at our First Parish Picnic together. It was phenomenal and amazing. I was deeply touched by everyone helping out and pitching in... the music, the food, the tents, the bbq, the games, the huge turnout and crowd, and the children. It was a little taste of Heaven for me and I said to myself, this is what this community is all about. I was so proud to be your pastor and want to thank you for your generosity and good-will throughout my time with you.

As I prepare to leave for parish work in the Diocese of Charleston in South Carolina I will never forget you in my prayers. I've been preparing for my time in South Carolina by watching lots of CNN, practicing my southern drawl, and getting the recipe for corn grits and mint juleps. If I come back to Cape Breton with a half ton truck, Confederate Flag and a shot gun in the back seat, slap me. Please pray for me and as I will surely pray for you and this vibrant faith community of St. Leonards. Thank you and God bless you all.