

Today we celebrate the mystery of God and God's inner life. It is part of the revelation of the Christian Faith that God is best understood when thought of as a community of three persons, a family of three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who give of themselves in self-sacrificing love. We the children of God are called to form such communities of self-giving, self-sacrificing love. This is one reason we have parish churches where we can learn to care for each other, even for those whom we may not like very much, because we believe that God has called all of us into this larger family where we can experience something of God's love and acceptance and draw other people into this fellowship where they too can experience God's love through us as individuals and as a community.

As the days count down to my retirement I want to speak today about this community, which I can still call our community and how it is going to face the transition from this old rector of 26 years to the new one. There are a few clergy who with their particular gifts are able to enter such a parish at this time in its life and sail right through without a great deal of difficulty, but the reality is that most of us are ordinary people and transitions can be rough for the priest as well as for the community. From my observations Nahabedian's second law comes into play in the transition from a long term incumbency to the next priest. And this law states that a priest following a long-term incumbency will be there for a relatively short time and the going can sometimes be very rough.

It does not necessarily have to be this way if the congregation can do what is technically called its 'grief work'. This means that the congregation talks about what these years have meant and gives thanks for the good things, and deals with those things that were not so good. By talking about what we have done together over the years, the congregation is able then to accept the fact that one chapter in the life of the parish has ended and another is about to begin and then can face the future, not with fear about the changes, but with hope of an even better future and looking forward to the new phase as an adventure.

It is said that there are only two things for certain in life – death and taxes, but there is a third and it results from death, as well as a lot of other things – namely change. Nothing in this life stands still. We human beings are restless beings and we are always changing. Our very bodies keep changing and therefore life with it.

When I was at St Thomas's Church, the rector and I decided to move the "Gloria in Excelsis" to its proper place at the beginning of the Mass. There were only a few complaints. One person said, "I don't know why we have to change things. Why can't we leave things the way they were back in 1910." My response was that she probably would not have liked the liturgy of 1910 and that it was because of all the changes made since then that we had the liturgy that we did, the liturgy she was used to. When I said to another complainant that we did this to bring the liturgy into conformity with

other Catholic liturgies, he said, "I'm an Englishman. And I don't care about Catholic liturgy." And the third comment was, "Why do you new boys come in here and always want to change things?" And, of course, the answer is that this is the vocation of new members of a parish. Otherwise you might just as well stuff me and stick me in a corner and I could always be the rector and nothing need change.

Every parish has to change and manifest for its age the eternal truths and worship of God, but this means changing all the time. St Mary Magdalene's as Fr Fairweather noted in our history book has had the capacity to make changes sometimes bumpily, but still making changes that keep us rooted in our time without losing the inspiring worship that so many appreciate. And this is what we hope is going to happen when the next rector comes. He or she may promise not to change anything, but the reality is that the next person will not be me, nor will the person have all my skills or failings and therefore just because of this fact, things are going to be different.

We have shown ourselves that we can accept change, for there have been some significant changes in our parish life over these last 26 years. And there is much for which we are grateful to God. But this is not the end for our community; one chapter is closing, but a new chapter is beginning. Each and every person in the parish is here primarily to worship God and grow in the Faith. What we have done together is one phase in our lives and yet there is still room for us to grow and the assumption is that the next priest who will have particular gifts and insights and experiences will help you all to grow in faith in ways that you may never have expected. In other words it is going to be different and thank God for that. Besides as I have said before the loyalty of each and everyone of us is not to the priest or the quality of the music or the ceremonial or a bit of the architecture, but it is to Jesus our Lord and Saviour. If our loyalty and faith are in him, then we can be certain we are on the right track and nothing, not even a new priest, not even change, will dismay us as we cope with a new era in the parish's life.

As I have said before I never intended to stay at St Mary Magdalene's for this long. I had thought I should be here for 10 or 12 years and then go. But, without sounding too presumptuous, maybe our 26 years together were God's way of allowing us to do things together that could not be done with a priest during a shorter time period.

No rector or even priest-in-charge of this parish has ever gone to another parish in the Diocese of Toronto. This parish has a reputation of being far out and as one priest said to me "hardly Anglican". So it becomes difficult for rectors from here to go to another parish in the Diocese. My three immediate predecessors became Roman Catholics. Before them, all moved to the U.S.A. or another diocese in Canada. The last person to retire and stay in Toronto was our founding rector, Fr Darling.

The Anglican tradition is that the priest who leaves does not return to the parish except with the express permission of the rector. This is a custom meant to give the new priest room to get to

know the new community and to begin to make the changes that the priest needs in order to be the leader in the parish. And it is a tradition I will respect.

In August our relationship changes. In a way it is difficult to understand how having grown together the priest can leave and not care about the people left behind. Though, Janet and I shall leave, you can be certain that I shall continue to care, but it will be the task of the new priest to care for you and to be your pastor. It is no disloyalty to me to be loyal and faithful to the new priest. In fact I would find it a great compliment to hear that the people of St Mary Magdalene's were moving into a new era of growth and going from strength to strength. It would mean that despite the discomfort some might feel with the changes being made, they would remain loyal to Christ and would remain in the parish with its new priest. And it would mean that my work here had been capped by the way the people accepted the reality of moving forward into this new chapter of the parish's life. And remember it only takes us time, somewhere just over a year, to get used to new and different ways.

But, in order to do all this, in these next couple of months we shall have to do a lot of talking about what these years have meant to us. In other words we shall have to do what is technically called "grief work", or saying good bye to the past, so that you and I can let go of the past and the past shall not dominate our futures. When we mourn for the past, we are letting it go and the past will no longer control us and then we can begin to get on with the rest of our lives.

A couple of weeks ago I met the young pastor who is beginning at Ossington Ave Baptist Church. His senior pastor said to him that he was going to please everybody in the parish. I said, 'Really?' Yes, he said he would please some when he arrived and he would please the rest when he left. Well, I may be pleasing some as I leave and I hope the new priest will please some as the person arrives to become your new priest.

Our Lord was one of the greatest agents for change in the life of the world by his preaching and teaching and by his leaving this world so that his followers all over the world, could become the agents for change in our world. We have been incorporated into the Body of Christ and have received the Holy Spirit and know a little bit about our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who calls us into fellowship with the Godhead and with one another. And then feeds us with the power and life of Jesus Christ at this Eucharist so that this part of Christ's Body can become a sign of what God's kingdom is going to be like.

God bless us all in the tasks that lie before us.

*Fr Harold*