

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, 10 September 2023

Scriptures: Ezekiel 33:7-9; Romans 13:8-10; Matthew 18:15-20

Homily: Fr. Ken

In this weekend's Gospel from Matthew, Jesus speaks about the community of the earliest believers, his own apostles and disciples, and about their relationships with each other.

His most important statement comes at the end of the narration. Jesus says: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them".

The love of God is all about community. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, and after Pentecost, we read in the New Testament, in the Acts of the Apostles, and the Letters of St. Paul, how the early Christians actually lived. They lived as people in community. They shared everything together.

And when they prayed, and when they celebrated Mass, they did it as a community. That continued for a few centuries.

Soon Christianity became the state religion of the Holy Roman Empire. As centuries continued, various devotions emerged, and as time went on, there was a tendency toward a privatization of the spiritual life.

Reformers emerged who reacted and started forming communities once again. Among them most famously were St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Dominic, St. Ignatius, and so many others. And it stayed that way throughout the world right up until the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

The mission of Vatican II was to update and reform the Church, looking back to the earliest days.

Central to this was a revived focus on community, and full and active participation in the Mass, just as Jesus did and his apostles and disciples after him.

For the nineteen years that I have been here at St. Rita's, we have followed that spirit of community enhancing our Masses with music and active lay participation, and any number of other spiritual and social events including this Sunday afternoon's St. Rita Parish Picnic.

However, in these past years, we have unfortunately experienced the same reality of most all parishes in the United States, namely a noticeably significant lack of attendance.

Moving forward is a challenge. Our motto has always been "We Are the Church". We believe the Holy Spirit is dynamic and active in each and every one of us.

Inspired and guided by Pope Francis, we have actively participated in the worldwide synodal process. The viewpoints, the opinions, the perspectives, and the recommendations from Catholics throughout the entire world, as represented by their respective national bishops, will be discussed in Rome during the synodal gathering at the Vatican. Pope Francis will be listening attentively.

Back here in Fairfax, our recently established St. Rita Synod Committee has already moved aggressively forward with a number of different initiatives including the parishioner-led Lenten Lecture Series, the monthly Food-Drive, the Liturgical Environment activities, Music ministry, Liturgical functions, and prospects for personal enrichment including parish spiritual retreats.

And so we move progressively with the support and encouragement of our blessed Pope Francis.