

Why Sunday Offertory is important: A Pilgrims Story

I have been a parishioner of St. Pet's for over 22 years. I am a member of the Knights of Columbus, the Parish Council and heading up the recently formed Leadership Team that will promote a new initiative to find creative and engaging ways to meet and support everyone here at St. Pet's where they are truly at in their own personal journey through life.

Today however, I am here to talk to you about everyone's favorite topic; the Sunday Offertory, but I specifically want to do so by connecting its relevance to this journey I just mentioned.

To frame my comments on this, my wife Any and I recently returned from a pilgrimage to Fatima, Lourdes and the shrines of Spain and Portugal. It was organized by Deacon Ron, and attended by 26 parishioners and friends from St. Pet's and St. James'. It was truly what I call an experience of the 3 F's; Faith, Family and Food.

Together in the spirit of family the 2 dozen or so of our group combined with 20 Philipinos from various parts of the US experienced the power of, and spent quality time at, a multitude of places sacred to our Catholic faith.

To round it all off, we also enjoyed some of the best food and wine the Iberian Peninsula has to offer, all in the spirit of a shared camaraderie for the pilgrimage we were on.

We laughed, we prayed, we cried and, most importantly, simply spent time absorbing the physical and emotional immensity of these places along with the intense experience they offered each of us in our own personal way. We also observed many others from around the world as well, each at their own place, on their own very personal journey.

Truly spectacular in every way describable.

What really struck me after returning, though, was that these shrines exist not because someone thought it was a good idea to entice religious tourists to come spend money on rosaries and icons and to take pictures to remember what happened there a long time ago. They were built by fervent people who felt deeply compelled to share the essence of what happened at these places. Built so everyone can go to discover and contemplate where they themselves are at on their own personal journey through life; both as an individual as well as a Catholic.

I began to realize more clearly that without these places, especially those we identify with as Catholics, a key element would be missing that just might help address the two elemental questions of our human condition; why am I here and where am I going?

We live in a very complex world. In this age of technology most of us carry a cell phone, which, at the touch of a button, gives us instant access to all the best, and all the worst, we humans are capable of.

It is precisely because of this that we must preserve these places so we know they will always be available to us at those times we need a direct and personal conversation with God about our own private, intensely personal struggles and desires far away from the din of modern life and its complexities.

To preserve the more famous of shrines so we can honor and contemplate the well documented miracles that occurred there; and equally important, preserve the not so famous local shrines we call our Parish Church where a quiet miracle occurs every day, on the altar, directly in front of us, during Mass.

That place to go to anytime, where we can look up and, in our own way, say what we need to say privately to that fully human and totally defenseless person that hangs in front of us, and to let him know; you make me want to be a better person.

Certainly, it is very important to support our Parish and its various ministries to provide needed services and to have a comfortable place to gather for Mass and the variety of other celebrations with friends and family; to share together our connection to the Catholic faith in that spirit of shared camaraderie.

But we must never lose sight that we need to ensure these places are available to us as individuals as well. To ensure that these places are available for our children to fully experience something very difficult to teach, but whose curiosity knows no bounds; to ensure they are available for our teenagers and young adults whose curiosity has turned into hope and confusion for all the choices and decisions they are facing; and to ensure they are available for the rest of us who thought we knew everything only to find out that life is what really happens as we try to execute our best laid plans.

That is really what a regular Sunday Offertory is all about; doing all we can do financially to preserve our simple shrine we call St. Pet's so it remains accessible to everyone, of all ages, at all times, and for all purposes, both intensely personal as well as in shared camaraderie.

It is very easy to compliment, criticize and complain about our Parish and then measure the response. But to watch our Parish physically and spiritually fall into disrepair because we do not properly engage in it, or properly support it, the effects are immeasurable.

I ask that you please keep these thoughts in mind and always remember that financial giving is not just about helping maintain the physical structures of our Parish, but to support the physical people that constitute the soul and essence of it as well. Always think to give what you can, as often as you can, and in every way you can, to help preserve what is not easily replaced if lost.

Thank you for listening and God bless us everyone.

Tim Barder: November 2016