

THE RECTOR'S CHRONICLE

A NEWSLETTER OF THE CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

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Dear Parishioners and Friends,

Multitasking is not your friend. I know I am being contrarian in saying this, since multitasking is lauded and pushed on every side these days. Computer software, smartphones, tablets, are all held up to us with the advantage of letting us multitask easily. And the idea of doing more than one thing at a time is attractive, since it suggests we will be able to get more done. We would all like to get more done.

But is doing multiple things at once really a good idea? In some circumstances it is obviously dangerous: to text while driving, or “tweet” while the baby is in the bath water. But even the more benign occasions present a basic problem. On the one hand, since we live in time, we do things one after the other: such is the nature of our temporal existence. As a result we have a built-in difficulty in paying attention to more than one thing at a time. We may flit back and forth, but I'm not convinced that it is really possible to do more than one thing at a time. If this is true, then multitasking comes down to shorter and shorter spans of attention: a few seconds this and a few seconds that. This suggests that what we are doing will not be done well, since the tasks are not getting real, sustained attention.

On the other hand, the whole idea of multitasking as something good is based on the assumption that life is about getting things done. I admit that the world often operates as though this were the case (and when we are being worldly, we do too). But it is false. Human life, and Christian life, is more about love than about accomplishments. How would lovers think of multitasking? Would the young woman being courted, be pleased to have her lover texting while they are on a date? Would she not justly expect that he would pay attention to her and her alone when they were together? Is not this of the essence of love?

This in turn shows us why multitasking is counter-productive if not dangerous for Christians. As Christians, we profess to want to pray, to adore our Lord, to love Him. All this requires attention. That we dislike distractions when we are trying to pay attention is a tip off: we need to learn to pay attention and have a hard time of it. What is true for prayer is also true for other things: paying attention requires that we focus on the subject, and exclude others. Trying to do multiple things leads us to pay full attention to none.

How we deal with the mundane things – work, home, driving, etc. – affects what happens when we come to prayer. If we cultivate distractedness, as, for example, by multitasking, then we will bring distractedness to our prayer. If, on the other hand, we cultivate attention, this will bear fruit at the time of prayer. I would suggest therefore that we renounce multitasking, and strive to do one thing at a time, so far as that is possible. Obviously it is not always possible. A mother with young children will need to keep an eye on them while she does the dishes, and will be listening for the baby's cry even when she is asleep. God has given us the ability to do this. But when we have the choice, we want to pay attention to what we are doing. This may mean that we put the cell phone aside and ignore the incoming texts so that we can attend to something else. It may mean turning off the television or radio which we have kept on in the background. It certainly means that we strive to attend to the one thing before us, and cultivate the discipline of single-tasking, so far as possible. This will be counter-cultural, and we must be prepared for being out of sync with the world around us. But this is often true for Christians, and we might as well get used to it.

In any case, if you would like to pray without distractions, then consider how you live when you are not praying. If you cultivate distractions then, you will only make life harder at the time of prayer. Conversely, any effort to cultivate attention, whether reading, or working, or doing the dishes, will bear fruit in prayer. On the “accomplishment” side: my suspicion is that we will get at least as much done by attending to what we are doing (“single-tasking”) than by multitasking. But if we should seem to get less done, let it be a reminder that we are not to live for the sake of getting stuff done to our standards. We are to do what God gives us to do, no more and no less. Our deeds are to be done as the expression of our love, not for the sake of the accomplishment.



As is so often the case, the “little” things turn out to be extremely important. A little multitasking, a little indulgence of distractedness at work or at home, and we make attention at the time of prayer impossible. We make the kind of prayer and quiet intimacy with God which we crave impossible.

Friends of the Ordinariate in Philadelphia

We are this month launching the Friends of the Ordinariate in Philadelphia. Its purpose is:

- *to support the mission of Ordinariate congregations in the region of southern and central New Jersey, southeastern Pennsylvania and northern Delaware (currently St Michael's is the only one).*
- *to help develop new Ordinariate congregations in the region.*
- *to connect Anglicans, whether already in communion with the See of Peter or not, with the Ordinariate.*
- *to articulate the purpose and mission of the Ordinariate to Catholics and others interested in it.*

The aim is to involve people in the mission of the Ordinariate in the region even though they may not be members of St Michael's. The Ordinariate is a new thing after all; we need help getting the word out that we are up and running. We also need help explaining what it is we are about, especially to those in the Latin Rite. And we need help identifying those who might benefit from being a part of an Ordinariate congregation. We will be inviting those who have visited St Michael's to join, as well as those who have been a part of our larger family over the years. If you know of people who might be interested, please let me know and I will see that they receive an invitation to join.

As I have mentioned in the past, Msgr Steenson has asked us to serve as the portal for the region. So we need to find those who are part of the Anglican patrimony and are ready to establish Ordinariate congregations, and then help them to do so. My hope is that the Friends will help with this, as well as supporting St Michael's with our various needs as we get more permanently settled. It is important for us to think of our mission not just in terms of building up St Michael's, important as that is. We are part of this great experiment, which the Holy Father has launched, of preserving and developing the Anglican patrimony within the fold of the Catholic Church. This is an exciting task. Daunting as well. If we give ourselves to it generously, God can and will do some great things.

All Saints & All Souls

All Saints Day is November 1st, a Thursday this year. It is an Holy Day of Obligation (like all the Sundays of the year), when we all have an obligation to be at Mass. Given the wide geographic spread of our parishioners, I would expect that some parishioners will attend Mass in a local Roman parish. For the convenience of everyone else, there will be two Masses at St Michael's: 8 a.m. at Holy Cross (as is usual on Thursdays), and 6 p.m. at the rectory Oratory. On All Souls, November 2nd, we pray for the faithful departed. While this is not a day of obligation, it is nevertheless a day when we will want to be at Mass to join our prayers to those of the church, especially remembering in our hearts those who are dear to us. Masses on All Souls Day will be at 8 a.m. and 6 p.m., both Masses at the rectory Oratory. With the mailed edition of *Chronicle* I include an offering envelope and a form for you to list the faithful departed to be remembered at the altar on All Souls. Christian names suffice. I will attach the form to the electronic edition, but sending the envelope electronically is beyond my capability. So those on the email list get photos in *Chronicle* but no envelopes. The lists can be mailed to me or put in the Sunday collection. I will remember all the names at each Mass.

Other Stuff of Interest

I have started offering the laying on of hands for healing after the Sunday Mass on the first Sunday of the month. In adding this, I have in mind especially those who cannot attend the weekly healing service after the ten o'clock Mass on Wednesday, which continues as usual.

I had hoped by now to announce that we were moving to a more permanent location. Unfortunately, some complications have arisen, and we are waiting to see how they can be resolved. How this will work out is unclear as of this writing. Do keep the matter in your prayers.

Special thanks goes this month to Bruno Dantas, who (with help from his wife Eileen) has given us a re-designed parish web site. If you have not already seen it, try www.ordinariatephiladelphia.org. He claims that he has long wanted to know how to code in html and css, and our need just gave him the opportunity. In any case, he learned, and we are the beneficiary. I gather Eileen helped with the design and aesthetics of the new site, and we are grateful to her as well.



I'm planning to continue the Sunday adult forum during coffee hour. We started this last fall when we began our catechesis before being received into the communion of the Catholic Church. While we no longer have that particular purpose, I think it will be useful to spend a half hour each week on various topics of im-

portance to Christian life and thought. In the course of the catechesis we discovered some areas where we were not all on the same page, and those things are worth a visit. But there are a lot of other things, whether in areas of Latin Rite practice which we should be familiar with, or the new Ordinariate liturgies as they appear, or matter of prayer or morals or (even) dogma. The plan is for a variety of topics. We are presently concluding a series on social justice. This is an area where the Catholic Church has a body of official teaching – unlike the Anglican Way. The usual pattern will allow for a half hour or so of coffee hour, and then a half hour of adult forum, both in the undercroft at Holy Cross. Please plan to join us!

The Wednesday Bible study is just finishing up on the book of Revelation, having had a wonderful time with it. It is not an easy book, but there is much good meat there. I have enjoyed our time with it, and I trust others have as well. Next up, we return to the Old Testament with the fourth book of Moses, Numbers, which covers (among other things) the journey of the people of Israel from Sinai to the border of the Promised Land. Since we have previously studied Genesis and Exodus, this seemed a logical choice for our next book. New class members are always welcome, whether in person (11 a.m. at the rectory) or by telephone on the conference call. If you want to call in, let me know, and I'll give you the details.

There are several things going on at Holy Cross and St Madeleine Sophie which should be of interest. In observance of Respect Life Month (October) in the Catholic Church, the Pro-Life Union raises money for the cause through the Baby Bottle Campaign. The bottles are available in Holy Cross on Sundays: please take one, fill it with your spare change and bring it back at the end of the month. Second, there is another in the occasion series of theological lectures on Sunday, October 21st at 3 at the Holy Cross School auditorium. Catherine Wilson, a professor of political science at Villanova, will speak on the Prophetic Nature of Democracy. Finally, St Madeleine Sophie will host a parish mission, Sunday to Tuesday, October 21st to 23rd, at seven each evening. The preacher is Fr Bruce Lewandowski, C.Ss.R., and all are welcome.

Faithfully,

David Ousley