

I arrived here at St. Martin's on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011 and it was a hot day. My kindly confreres, Fathers Henry, Jim and Poly, a wonderful Indian Redemptorist helping during the summer, welcomed me warmly and told me that my room was nice and cool since they had turned the air-conditioning on earlier. How simple a deed that was, but it was kind and has always stayed with me. As you know from listening to me over the years, I like to remember. Remembering can be very sacred. Throughout the Old Testament, the Jewish people often suffered and were crushed by stronger nations, but they have continued to celebrate Passover through the centuries to this very day. It is their foundational memory of God setting them free from the Egyptians. When they remember this moment in history, it not mere reminiscing; the memory of the saving actions of God in their past is so powerful that it will sustain them in the present and into the future. In faith they say: *If God saved us before, he will save us again.* We know this pattern very well as Catholics. Every Mass we celebrate is an act of entering into the most mysterious and awesome moment of human history. We celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus and seal this covenant with the eating and drinking of the Body and Blood of Jesus. We proclaim: *Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come.* We are now the Living Body of Christ on earth. We can move into the future with hope because of the experiencing the fidelity of God all the days of our lives.

Remembering. There are so many memories that I carry with me as I leave our parish community that my Redemptorist confreres and I have come to truly love. I think of my first days here with Hurricane Sandy and the parish hall being filled with people who had no power at home and wanted to get on the internet, and get out of their homes and chat with others. Donations poured in from parishioners of donated clothes, bottled water, food and money. I remember there were some leaks in the church even before Sandy, but they had grown worse after the great storm. I saw a puddle on the floor in the sanctuary, and I told Kathie Speelman who was the sacristan about the water and the need to mop it up. She quickly told me that she would show me where the mop was. I think I asked her what is a mop. I knew I was no longer provincial at that moment. At a Confirmation ceremony, there was a mini-lake forming nearing the confirming bishop. Deacon Jim Biggin was on the floor with towels trying to dry the water up in the midst of the sacred ceremony. A few years later we would gather at his hospital room and say the prayers for the dying and I wept tears as did the parish when we celebrated his funeral. My great assistant, God rest her, Mary Langdan, wanting to help me, so without asking, she called the diocese

building officer informing him that our new pastor had a leak in the church roof and he doesn't know what to do. Mary would call me sometimes 7/8 times a day and died a lonely death since we did not know what hospital she was in. I wish I could have one more phone call from her.

I have never liked backing up my car. I only can drive forward. But when I arrived here at St. Martin's I had my own driveway but it was one way in and to leave, so I had to back out since there was no room for a U turn. There were some brush and a small scraggly tree blocking what could be another exit that would allow me to drive forward out. Not wanting to be a demanding pastor, I built up my courage and said to Ronnie Manrath; the head of the garden committee, if it were possible, and I don't mean to tell you what to do, but maybe someday we could open this path up so I could drive forward out through the parking lot. Two hours later the tree and brush was gone and Frank Mikalenous was filling in tar to make the road smooth. You are parishioners who love your priests. A couple of years, later, dying of cancer, Ronnie gave me a check for \$2000.00, asked me to say nothing about it while she was alive, to purchase chairs for the parish hall that would have cushions. I had the joy of being a Grand Marshall of the St. Patrick's Day Parade, but as you might recall there was about eight inches of snow falling on that day. Our beloved John Joyce, now home with the Lord, told me, *Next year we are getting a rabbi.*

I look over by our accessible ramp into the parish hall and still visualize Diana Hughes and the youth group loading heavy bags of donated clothes into a truck. I will never celebrate another November 11th, the Feast of St. Martin of Tours, without thinking of the Knights of Columbus gathering coats at Mass from all of you for those in honor of our patron St. Martin. If you see a person in town with a tear stained Jet jacket, know that it is mine.

I remember the capital campaign Paving the Way for Christ. I was far more use to spending money than in raising it. Years ago, a German Redemptorist told me, *we Germans made the money and you Irish are spending it.* The financial and pastoral councils encouraged me to move forward, and I was told by the Lynch Fundraising Company we hired that we might be able to raise 1.2 million. I was a bit skeptical that we could reach that goal and was overwhelmed when the generous and loving people of this parish raised close to 1.7 million dollars. The night we called for volunteer to help, almost a hundred people showed up at the meeting. I have a powerful memory a person handing me a generous check and saying, *I was*

*saving this for a long awaited vacation but I want to give it to campaign.* I tried to convince her to keep the money but she insisted.

I will never look at a red wagon and not think of the love you have for those in need with your weekly donations of food and household materials. When I now see an empty baby bottle I see coins and dollars filing them for the Life Center and through the dedication of our Pro-Life Ministry, St. Martin's became the first parish to ever to ever be named Life Center Parish of the Year. I am convinced there are children alive today because of what you have done.

I can close my eyes and see the regulars of the 630 Mass, Vic and Joe, Lou and Terri and Gerri Larria, who would wear a winter coat in July to remind me that air condition might be bit high. I wish we still had that problem now. I can see Tommy the usher up and down the aisle at the 7:00 Mass on Saturday night. I can still hear the voice of Harry Smith saying *My Brother and My Sisters* or proclaiming the Easter *Alleluia*. This is parish that loves retreats and missions. Will we ever forget the night during an anointing service we ended up with what looked like war paint on our faces? I saw little server grow up to be teenagers before my eyes, with Samantha and William McNamara moving from altar servers to Eucharistic ministers. I think of Ann Hughes asking us to come to the water at the Easter Village and the joy of all of us as we welcomed new members to our parish community. At a Christmas pageant a boy playing St. Joseph, knocked on the presider's chair, chair and forget what he was to say to the Bethlehem innkeeper. I whispered to him, *Say open up, I need help*. So he proclaimed to the congregation: *Say Open Up I need help*.

I met God in the home of the dying Chris Maggio when I asked her if she was afraid to die, she told with a brilliant smile, *I can't wait to meet Jesus*. Wow. What a gift of faith you have given to us Redemptorist. I rarely went into the church without seeing Deacon Tom saying his office, or someone kneeling in front of the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and another visiting Jesus in the tabernacle. You inspired us Redemptorists. I was so happy they day we had Deacon Jim, Gene and Tom made Redemptorist oblates. Two are with God and we know Tom, along with Chris and Ron to be the great deacons and deacon to be that they are.

I will remember the block Block Parties. People smiled at the continual promise of the pastor promising lobster and filet mignon and telling that same joke over and over, and the kindness of the people giving a patient smile. Hundreds of parishioners sharing hamburgers and dessert made by the great Clement Bakers

and eagerly lining up to dunk the pastor. I loved first communion and the patience of dear Marliese who every year heard the pastor tell the people that *Marliese taught catechism to Moses*. I remember a Halloween party where Father Ciya dressed up as Elvis and after the party he asked us *who Elvis is*. On Christmas and Easter, I worried where Father Ciya would go for dinner. I stopped worrying when I found out he has two invitations to breakfast, four to dinner, seven to deserts, and four more for leftovers. You are a welcoming people. When Father Denis needed medical treatment, the parish lined up to pray for him, ask him how he was, and offered to drive him for his treatment. How you love us. You rejoiced and celebrated the day Father Jim was ordained a priest and many made the trip to Philadelphia. I was at his ordination and dinner reception. Our beloved now deceased Annie Chesowitz asked me if was to be the new pastor. I said yes. She said she had something to ask me. I wondered if was going to be about Mass schedules or some changes in the church. She asked *will you be running trip to Atlantic City*. We miss you Annie. I remember the funeral Mass for Firefighter William Tolley and how Elena playing *Alle Alle*, with the song brought his daughter Bella a small moment of comfort as she lost mourned dad. I remember some of the firefighters attending her first communion and receiving a great ovation from all the families to lift them up. What a parishioners. I think of the late Joe and his dear wife Mary Calavolpe, putting out the infant Jesus on the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month in honor of the Redemptorist tradition of little Christmas. When we put our new video system in, Eamon Fitzgerald told me, remember Father a picture is worth a thousand words. It was Irish diplomacy telling me to shorten my homilies. As a parish, we did a lot of laughing together.

Memories- memories -memories. In spite of your sorrow and sadness at the decision of the Redemptorists to return the care of the parish to the diocese, in your own hurt, you have made put your tears aside and did everything you could to assure we Redemptorist how loved and appreciated we were, and to send us forth with the ringing sounds of: *we will miss you, we will never forget you, come back again, we love you*. Each of our Redemptorists here and all our communities has a copy of the beautiful book *Plentiful Redemption*, filled with your pictures and touching words. I will pick that book up in the years to come and feel the bond of love shared for 33 years by the parishioner and Redemptorist priests of St. Martins.

There are four ways we think about the Body of Christ:

- There is the body of Christ who walked the earth for 33 years

- There is the resurrected body of Christ that appeared to the early church and now sits at the right hand of the father.
- There is the body and blood of Christ present on the altar the Holy Eucharist and in the tabernacle
- There is the body of Christ, the people of faith, who eat his body and drink his blood, hear his word, and follow him. You too are the living body of Christ now present here on earth. *How beautiful is the Body of Christ.*

St. Theresa of Avila says this so well: *Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours, Yours are the eyes through which to look out Christ's compassion to the world Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good; Yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now.*

Wherever there is love, there is God. To quote my favorite musical: To love another person is to see the face of God.

One final memory: when we had the installation Mass for me as pastor, I remembered that I ended the homily with these words from the classic movie *Casablanca*:

Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

How true that proved to be.