

Back when I was in High School, as part of an art class,
I had a chance to make some pottery.
We would take the clay, knead it for a long time, and then place it on the potter's wheel.
There we would fashion it in to the creation it was supposed to be.

I wasn't very good at it.
I tried to make a cup once....but it turned out so bad it became an ashtray for my mom.
Next I tried to make a candy bowl but instead my mom got a second ashtray.
When all was said and done I had nothing that I started to make....
And mom had a lot of ash trays.

One thing I learned though is that to make good pottery you need to prepare the clay.
You can use bad clay, it just takes a lot more work.
Isaiah said as much in our first reading today where He says
God is the potter and we are the clay.

I want to use that image to focus in on two things today.

First I want to focus in a little bit on the fifth point of our parish vision statement:
We want parishioners who are committed to daily prayer
and can pray spontaneously when asked to do so.

Then, I want to talk about Stewardship of our Time:
What are you going to do to grow in your faith walk in 2018?

And I think both of these tie in with Isaiah challenging us to let God mold us
into the people God wants us to be.

Let begin by talking about prayer.
I think all of us are probably on board with the first half of that vision statement:
wanting to pray more, wanting a better prayer life.
Where I think we tend to lose people is in the second part of that vision statement:
And can pray spontaneously when asked to do so.

I think many Catholics struggle with that...It is not something most of us,
myself included, grew up doing.

Why do we think it is so necessary that we included it as part of the vision statement for
our parish?

The reason is that I've seen the power it has in my own life and in the lives of others.

You see, I had never prayed spontaneously, out-loud, until I was 27 years-old and
On a parish internship while I was a seminarian.
I spent a year at St. Monica Parish in Indianapolis—
a parish that placed a value on praying out-loud in groups.

It was always a moving experience for me...and it still is today.

And not just for me. A few weeks ago I received this email.

Dear Fr. Tom,

My son and I recently attended the parish day of reflection for 1st Reconciliation. I really took to heart what you said about praying spontaneously. Our family has always said the traditional prayers before bedtime and meals, not that there is anything wrong with that. But recently my boys have taken turns saying spontaneous prayers and they have said some of the most genuine, heartfelt, and amazing prayers I have ever heard. Sometime I can just burst when I hear them praying. Thank you for the suggestion. It has made our family prayer time extra special.

That's the power of spontaneous prayer...and that is why we think it is important enough to include in our vision statement.

Now I know that many of you are a little afraid of this, so I encourage you to practice.

Find someone you trust and try it...it might be your spouse, your children, your grandchildren, the bathroom mirror.

I'll help get you started: Dear God....Thank you (what do you want to thank God for)...

Watch over...(who does God need to watch over in a special way)...Bless....

I need help with....

Are you the kind of clay that God can mold into a spontaneous prayer machine????

The second part of my homily this week is our annual reflection on the Stewardship of our Time.

For those who are new to our parish, about three years ago our Stewardship Commission made the decision to break down annual stewardship drive into three different Stewardship Drives:

One for Time, one for Talent and one for Treasure.

We did that rather than focusing in on all three at the same time because when we did that people only heard the treasure part...and time and talent were just always linked together.

But we believe they are three distinct parts of total Stewardship.

Stewardship of our Treasure is all about how we use our financial resources for God's glory.

Stewardship of our Talent, when we did just a few weeks ago is how we are going to serve our parish and beyond in the coming year.

Stewardship of our Time is all about how we are going to use our time to grow our faith in the coming year.

We are calling this year's Stewardship appeals: Go Beyond Sunday because true stewardship is a way of life and not simply a program and it always involves more than one day a week.

What are you going to do this year to Go Beyond Sunday in your relationship with God?

At the end of the pews you will find a green sheet of paper.

For veterans of the parish this should look familiar by now...

It is a listing of several things you can do to grow your faith beyond the Sunday Mass.

I want to highlight a few of them.

The first is go to "formed.org" and register.

Formed is an on line spiritual growth resource center.

It has video series, movies, talks, Bible studies...

all that you can do from the confines of your own home.

A great way to grow in your faith in 2018.

The next one I want to highlight are connect with Mission Beyond—
our year-long look at the seven points of our vision statement.

We have three more coming up:

On January 13, Fr. Adrian Burke will be here to have Mass,
followed by dinner and a presentation.

Then on February 18 we will have a presentation on Eucharist,
why do we come to the table.

And on March 10 we will have a parish day of service where will have
as many parishioners as possible participating in service on the same day.

And then on April 13-15 we will conclude this Mission Beyond Initiative with our Parish Mission. David Wells, a tremendous speaker, will be here from England to present our Mission.

He will be with us for three nights so that as a parish family we can grow together.

Our Spiritual Life Commission has developed over the last several years
two opportunities to grow together as a parish family:

A parish Mission in the spring and a parish day/evening of retreat in the fall.

The fall evening of reflection this year will be tied in with our parish Feast day in October.

The Mother of Mary Missionaries will be here to present a talk on Divine Mercy.

We are planning this on October 21—to coincide with the Feast Day of St. John Paul II.
Divine Mercy was very close to his heart. Come and hear why.

Finally, look at the last one on that list.

Bring your Mass Journal to Church every weekend and use it.

Now I know you might be thinking, "I don't have a Mass journal."

Well, somehow we think you might get one for Christmas.

What is a Mass journal?

Have any of you ever gotten bored at Mass...

felt like you weren't getting anything out of it...

caught yourself getting distracted?

A Mass journal is a remedy for that.

You bring the journal to Mass and then you dare God to touch your heart...

It might be in the words of a song, it might be in a phrase from scripture.

It could be something that I say in the homily...or even something you see in Church.

But you come to mass with the EXPECTATION that God will speak to you in some way...

Then you write it in your journal...yes, right here in Church.

The great part about it is if you do that every week at the end of the year you have a spiritual journal for that year of 52 different times God has spoken to your heart.

At the bottom of that page, there is a tear off section that you are to fill out,

place in the envelope provided, address it to yourself, seal it and bring it back next week.

We will collect these as part of my homily next week.

This is a way of saying we are doing this together.

I won't read them....They are an agreement...a covenant between you and God.

Sometime in the first quarter of the year we will mail them back to you.

It will be a check point in your spiritual walk for the year.

Remember Isaiah? What kind of clay are you and how are you going to let the Potter

Mold you and your life to GO BEYOND SUNDAY?