

Parish Visitation Next Weekend

As you know, the Diocese of Rockville Centre, comprised of Nassau and Suffolk Counties, is divided into three geographic Vicariates, each with a Vicar appointed by Bishop Murphy to be his liaison and representative for the parishes within the Vicariate. This structure assists Bishop Murphy in his pastoral leadership and in his shepherding the people of the diocese. For 25 years, Bishop John Dunne, Auxiliary Bishop, was the Vicar for the Central Vicariate of which OLPH is a part. With Bishop Dunne's recent retirement, Bishop Murphy appointed Monsignor James McNamara as Vicar for the Central Vicariate.

Periodically, the Vicar makes a Parish Visitation to the parishes in his Vicariate, in order to get a sense of the life and direction of the parish, and to create a report which is then given to Bishop Murphy to update him on the state of the parish. Next weekend, December 7-8, Msgr. McNamara will be conducting his Parish Visitation here at OLPH.

It will be a busy weekend for him and for the parish. Msgr. McNamara will be preaching at all the Masses, in addition to presiding at one Mass. Starting Saturday at 9:00 a.m. and continuing through Sunday afternoon, he will meet with representatives from various parish ministries, societies and organizations, including the Pastoral Staff and all the Priests. Leaders and others from various groups in the parish have been contacted and have been asked to make their presence at these meetings a priority.

This is a great opportunity for all of us to reflect on and give thanks for the wonderful and vibrant parish OLPH is, and to share that with our Vicar. I know that everyone will give Msgr. McNamara a warm OLPH welcome as he meets and greets so many of you next weekend.

Advent

So, it's finally here — Advent! It's a new liturgical year! I know, I know...I've been hearing from everyone, and I've been saying it too: *Where has the year gone?* Time indeed does seem to pass by more quickly nowadays. Perhaps that makes it all the more important for each and every one of us to **make the time** for Advent quiet, for Advent reflection, for Advent

longing and anticipation and expectation; we need Advent joy to come into our life! Don't give in to the pressure to celebrate Christmas now; **keep Advent**, and I promise you your Christmas will be all the better!

Our *Little Blue Books* for Advent have all been taken. I'm glad they were popular, and I'm sorry that some people were not able to get them. Whether it's by using the *Little Blue Book*, or by participating in one or more of the many events we are offering for Advent, please, please, please take advantage of something to make Advent the special time of year that the Church wants it to be for you. It's only when we connect the rhythms and meaning of the Church's liturgical year with our own personal rhythms and spirituality that the mystery of Christ's presence in our daily life will really come to full fruition and its greatest realization.

Liturgy of the Hours: Evening Prayer

Communal celebration of Evening Prayer begins this weekend! What a grace and privilege it is for us to have this opportunity. Remember how it works — it's simple: each weekend (and not just during Advent, but ongoing) after the 5:00 p.m. Mass every Saturday and the 5:00 p.m. Mass every Sunday, those who wish to pray Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours will simply remain in the church and gather with the others who will be praying it. Booklets with the texts will be handed out. The prayer itself should take no longer than about 15 minutes or so.

The *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours* speaks of the importance of this prayer in the life of parishes: "Wherever possible, other groups of the faithful [*i.e.*, in addition to the clergy] should celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours communally in church. This especially applies to parishes—the cells of the diocese, established under their pastors, taking the place of the Bishop; they 'represent in some degree the visible Church established throughout the world.' Hence, when the people are invited to the Liturgy of the Hours and come together in unity of heart and voice, they show forth the Church in its celebration of the mystery of Christ." (21-22)

I do hope that you will participate in this beautiful prayer of the Church as much as you can.

Lessons and Carols: Save the Date!

There is possibly no more beautiful way to celebrate Advent than to participate in **Lessons and Carols**. You have seen the “save the date” blurb in the bulletin — Sunday evening, December 15, at 7:30 p.m. If you have attended a service of Lessons and Carols in the past, you know how spiritual and moving it is, and how it helps to mark Advent time so that we are properly prepared to celebrate Christmas. If you have never attended a Lessons and Carols, then you are in for a treat. Please make every effort to attend our parish’s celebration of Lessons and Carols.

Parish Penance Service: Save the Date!

Another “save the date” that I would like to call to your attention is Monday evening, December 9. On that evening we will be holding a **Parish Penance Service**. Without a doubt, in order to properly “prepare the way of the Lord,” we must prepare our hearts and our spiritual life by celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance). While times for individual Confession are offered, we really should be emphasizing our communal celebration of the Sacrament of Penance. After all, our sins affect not only our relationship with God, but also our relationship with our brothers and sisters in the Church. In addition, there is a great spiritual strength and comfort to be found in participating in a communal celebration of the Word and then celebrating individual Confession: it deepens our experience of the Sacrament and our encounter with God’s grace, since the setting is ecclesial (within the church community gathered together). The prayers, hymns and readings help us to make a better Confession and help us to enter into the mystery of God’s love and forgiveness more deeply.

I strongly encourage everyone to attend our Parish Penance Service on Monday evening, December 9, at 7:30 p.m. and to celebrate the Sacrament that night.

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception is celebrated each year on December 8. This year, however, December 8 falls on a Sunday, the Second Sunday of Advent. In accordance with the norms given in *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the General Roman Calendar*, the observance of this Solemnity is transferred to Monday, December 9, since the Sunday of Advent takes precedence. However, because the obligation to attend Mass is connected only to the actual day itself and does not transfer with the liturgical observance, Monday December 9 is not a Holy Day of Obligation. I know it seems confusing, but what it boils down to is that the Immaculate Conception will be celebrated on Monday, December 9, but **this year only** there is **no obligation** to attend Mass. Of course, just because there is no obligation, it does not mean that you CANNOT (or should not!) attend Mass that day. Because the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception is such an important day in our Catholic tradition, and because it is a wonderful Advent celebration, and because our parish is dedicated to Our Lady, I encourage everyone to make the extra effort to attend Mass that day if at all possible.

Consultation for the Synod of Bishops

Our Holy Father Pope Francis has called for an Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in October 2014 on the theme “The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization.” As is customary in the synod process, the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops invites consultation on this topic to help with its preparation. This is an exciting opportunity for the “church-at-large,” so to speak, to offer input and insights that might be helpful for the Bishops to keep in mind during their deliberations at the Synod. Bishop Murphy is welcoming responses from all the faithful of the Diocese of Rockville Centre. Full information about the Synod document, the reflection questions, and how to submit your answers are found elsewhere in this bulletin. I apologize for the limited time frame; we received the information too late to include in last week’s bulletin, but we did announce it at all the Masses and had the information available on the pew ledges in church. This weekend we are

publishing the information in the bulletin. If you would like to participate, please feel free to do so.

Allow me to clarify one thing, though: this is not to be interpreted as a survey in the sense of a poll or a political debate. **It is not the case whereby we are creating the expectation that Church teaching will be changing based on popular opinion, majority voting, prominent secular trends, or anything of the kind.** That's not the way the Church works. Church teaching is based on divinely-revealed Truth and Sacred Tradition, as handed down to us from the Apostles, and as the legitimate development of the Tradition has occurred under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the successors to the Apostles, the Bishops. What this consultation process does give us, however, is the opportunity for the Bishops to hear from a wide audience about the contemporary concerns regarding how Church teaching is being received in our day and age, and how we might make that teaching more effective and connected to life today. The Church constantly seeks to present the Gospel message and the Truth of Christ in ever new and fresh ways so that the Gospel might be effectively preached in every age. Pope Francis has given us a wonderful mechanism by which we can assist the Bishops as our Pastors and Teachers in making the truths of the Catholic faith alive and relevant to today.

In conclusion...

Together, let's aim high in Christ.
Together, let's bring out the best in each other.
Together, let's be the best we can be in Christ.

And let's always remember: LOVE IS A GIFT.

Sincerely,