

## 4<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – A (January 29, 2023)

Like last weekend, I first have a couple of things to share with you:

1. I found out that my surgery is set for 8 a.m. this Tuesday, Jan. 31, and that I need to be at MercyOne in Mason City bright and early at 5:30 a.m. (well, maybe not quite so ‘bright’...). My brother Tom will be coming here on Monday afternoon, and we will stay in Clear Lake that night which will make for a much shorter drive to the hospital the next morning. I’ll be there overnight on Tuesday, and then Tom will bring me back to Elma on Wednesday.

I’ll have the usual 8 a.m. Mass in Elma Monday morning, but there will obviously be some schedule changes thereafter:

- No further weekday Masses the rest of this week
- Fr. Dan Knipper (retired priest in Decorah) will cover the Masses next weekend (Feb. 4/5). I saw him at Fr. McGovern’s funeral in Riceville, and he’s looking forward to being with you next weekend, and I’m certainly grateful for his help.
- I hope (and I emphasize the word ‘hope’) to be able to resume weekday Masses a week from Monday (Feb. 6) and the weekend Masses the following weekend (Feb. 11/12), but I can’t promise that for now—it will depend on my recuperation process and how long that will take. I’ve heard from many of you: “Father, take the time you need; don’t think you have to rush back right away”. I really do appreciate your understanding, and don’t worry—I will take the time I need! I’ll let you know one way or the other through our cluster website and Facebook page.

I’m truly grateful for all your kindness, concern, prayers and best wishes; they are all very much appreciated!

2. I also need to share with you a bit of news that I learned from Archbishop Jackels at Fr. McGovern’s funeral: he told me that Tim Weber, who was going to do his seminarian internship with us here, has decided to leave the seminary at this time. This means, of course, that he will not be here for that internship. I was quite surprised to hear about this; I wasn’t aware of any thinking along these lines on his part. But I had a really good visit with Tim [yesterday]/Friday afternoon, and he said has been visiting with those in charge of his formation for some time about his vocation, in particular about his feeling drawn more and more to the possibility of marriage and family.

I told Tim that, on a selfish level, I was saddened to learn of his decision because I was really looking forward to working with him here. But the more he spoke, the clearer it became that he had really approached these questions prayerfully and calmly. The bottom line is that he is very much at peace about his decision, and that is of utmost importance. In no way is this any failure on Tim’s part or of the seminary. Rather, the process of discerning his vocation—in which the seminary plays a key role—worked successfully since Tim was able, with the seminary’s help, to discern more carefully and prayerfully the vocation to which God is calling him.

So we all certainly wish Tim well; please continue to keep him in your prayers. And pray also for all our seminarians and for an increase in their number.

3. Finally, the homily—and it will be brief. We hear today one of the most familiar and beloved of all gospel passages—the Beatitudes, which begins Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount that we will hear from the next few Sundays until the season of Lent late next month. This passage is frequently heard at both funerals and weddings, and understandably so. It describes so well what life as a disciple of Jesus Christ should look like, because it describes so well what Jesus is. He was certainly meek and humble of heart; he hungered and thirsted for justice; he was clean of heart and merciful, and all the rest...and so that is what he calls us to live and to be as well. In this sense we can call the Beatitudes a sort of ‘job description’ for being a Christian.

I recently read “Blessed Are You: Reflections on the Beatitudes” by Mother Mary Francis, a Poor Clare nun who died in 2006. It’s a wonderful, prayerful, and very practical set of meditations on this ‘blueprint for holiness’. I’ll have details in next week’s bulletin, but to whet your appetite for now, consider what she says about the simple word “blessed”, with which Jesus begins each of these Beatitudes. Mother Mary says that to be ‘blessed’ is more than simply feeling happy or joyful; rather, ‘it signifies being favored, set apart, already hallowed, holy’. And that is so true: every single one of us is blessed because we are indeed ‘favored’. We are favored by having received the gift of life on this earth, the reality of love on the human scale and most of all, the love of God who sustains us in this life and promises us infinite and perfect joy in the life beyond this one. And that favor, that state of ‘blessedness’ is with us no matter what we have to be dealing with in life—whether family concerns, job difficulties, or even the occasional surgery...

May God grant all of us the grace to be aware of just how favored we are by God, how blessed we are by God...and may we be ever more grateful.