

Saint Elizabeth Roman Catholic Church
Upper Uwchlan Township, PA
2014 FORTY HOURS DEVOTIONS: TMM HOMILIES

Monday Evening: *The Church- A Family of Faith on a Mission of Love*

Introduction: Those of you who were here last evening will recall that we began our three-part reflection on the *theme of family* with a consideration of the Holy Family as a model for family life. As Fr. James Martin reminds us: “a family need not be perfect to be good.” So we prayed yesterday that through the intercession of Joseph and Mary, our own families may truly become more like the holy family, united in respect and in love. Tonight we reflect upon the Church as a *family of faith on a mission of love*.

Here at Saint Elizabeth we celebrate Baptism just about every Sunday of the year, with more than 80 babies and a few adults baptized during 2014. And we have had a total of 1,770 baptisms since the founding of the parish in 2000!

At the end of the Baptism liturgy, I often invite all the children under 12 years old (and those adults who would like to feel like 12 again) to welcome the newly baptized into our “family of faith” with loud applause. I say a “family of faith” because it is in Baptism that we are given a new identity as members of one body, the Church, with Christ as its head. Baptism into Jesus Christ defines *who we really are!*

This baptismal identity is even more fundamental than the identity given to us by our biological parents. It is an identity that transcends whatever ethnic or cultural heritage we are born into. In Christ we are one body, and our personal identity is constituted by our relationships with one another within that Body of Christ.

In *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council’s *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, we read that God “willed to make men holy and save them, not as individuals without a bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge God and serve God in holiness.”

In the *First Letter of Peter*, this community of believers we call the Church is proclaimed as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own... Once you were no people, but now you are God’s people” (1 Peter 2/9-10).

So while each of us is invited into a deeply personal relationship with God through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, Christian life is not simply about me and Jesus; it's about all of us together in Christ as the People of God. So the Church really is a *family of faith*.

In tonight's reading from the *Letter to the Ephesians*, we heard Saint Paul urge us "to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4/1-7)

As an aside, I might add that what Fr. Martin said about our human families applies just as much to our church family: "a family need not be perfect to be good." So many people have exaggerated expectations about the Church and its members.

As has been made abundantly clear over the past fifteen years, while Jesus the Head is without sin, all the rest of us in the Body of Christ are still caught up in the struggle between grace and sin that defines human life this side of the grave. The Church remains a community of sinners on the way to salvation by the grace of God, not an assembly of the already saved! Welcome to a good, but hardly perfect family of faith!

Lumen Gentium goes on to say something more about the Church: the Church does not exist simply to help us get to heaven. The Church, the People of God to which we belong by Baptism, which has been established by God as a communion of life, love and truth, has a definite mission and purpose: it is intended by God to be the instrument for the salvation of all, sent forth into the whole world as the "light of the world and the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5/13-16).

The family of faith that is the Church has a clearly defined mission: to communicate to the whole world the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The Church is on a mission of love, a mission that you and I share, individually and as members of the family of faith. So your mission, if you choose to accept it....

In his letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul remind us that we are called to "live the truth in love" and to "grow in every way into Christ who is the head, from whom the whole body is held together, grows and is built up in love." (Eph 4/15-16)

So tonight, as we sit quietly before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, I encourage you to reflect upon your baptismal identity as a member of the Church, the body of

Christ. Sustained by the Holy Eucharist, may all of us here at Saint Elizabeth Church become more fully a *family of faith on a mission of love*.