

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday Lent  
February 16-17, 2013

*I have now brought you the first fruits*

Readings: Deuteronomy 26:4-10; Romans 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13

A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and Ryan, Kindergarten. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother, seeing the opportunity for a teachable moment, said to the older boy: “If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, ‘Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.’” Kevin, sheepishly smiling, then proceeded to turn to his younger brother and said, “Ryan, you be Jesus this morning.”

We hear in today’s 1<sup>st</sup> reading: “Therefore, I have now brought you the first fruits of the products of the soil which you, O LORD, have given me.” Are we ready to give to God our very best, the first fruits, or do we hold back? Giving only from our surplus is an action that carries with it little power to transform our lives. Giving from our substance requires a sacrifice and leads to conversion of mind and heart. Lent is about conversion of mind and heart and fasting from those things that, good in themselves, are not as needed as we think, and which can hinder us from giving our first fruits to God.

Dedicating ones first fruits to God was not a distinctly Jewish concept. Homer’s *Illiad*, the oldest work of Western literature, recounts the anger of Zeus’ daughter Artemis, due to the fact that King Oeneus had failed to offer her first fruits of his rich orchards. So she sent a wild boar to attack.<sup>1</sup> The idea in Jewish thought was “Serve God first” – then the whole crop becomes lawful food. Saving the best for God is honorable, but is extremely difficult to put into practice. It requires prayer and careful discernment, no less for you than for me. We may be afraid to trust that God will truly provide for our needs when we respond generously. It is a leap of faith.

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<sup>1</sup> *Iliad*, (IX, 529). Written in the sometime between 750 B.C. and 650 B.C.

During the holy season of Lent the Church calls us to be generous with our prayer, fasting and almsgiving. But it is even deeper. We are called to fast, not only bodily, but even liturgically: “In Lent, the altar should not be decorated with flowers, and musical instruments may be played only to give necessary support to the singing.”<sup>2</sup> This is in order for the penitential character of the season to be preserved. Taking these directives seriously helps us to experience the richness of the season. We are ‘fasting’ from the beautiful sound of the principal instrument throughout the history of the Church.

In the Latin Church the pipe organ is to be held in high esteem, for it is the traditional musical instrument which adds a wonderful splendor to the Church's ceremonies and powerfully lifts up man's mind to God and to higher things.<sup>3</sup>

Today, I wish to expand upon the letter I sent to all households about our organ restoration project. The need to replace and restore the organs was identified nearly ten years ago. While I take no credit for conceiving of this project, I willingly take responsibility for trying to complete it, leading the parish as a prudent steward of your generosity. Starting tomorrow the magnificent new organ case will be installed, and will be substantially completed by the time we celebrate the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent. You will surely notice a difference!

The other major task before us is to complete the funding to pay for this historic project. We are the caretakers of this great Cathedral. In that singular role I am asking us as a parish to take the lead on a final push to raise the remaining funds necessary to fully pay for this historic project before we first hear the first fruits of peoples labor. In truth, we have a large gap to fill for the organ project, and as I wrote in my parish financial report to you last November, we need to solve this together, both as parishioners and through the Heritage Foundation, which seeks to attract wider community support.

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<sup>2</sup> Congregation for Divine Worship, *Paschalis Sollemnitatis*, #17, 1988

<sup>3</sup> Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) #120

We have a world-class church building, and are currently installing what I think will clearly be one of the finest organs anywhere in the country. What you are seeing assembled behind you will be here long after us, and will be enjoyed for many generations to come.

As you know, Archbishop John Ireland desired for everyone to take part in the building of this Cathedral. He did so because he saw it as belonging to all. The organ casing design took as its starting point the original drawings of Emmanuel Masqueray- a casing that was never realized, but now soon will be. Today, I invite participation at all levels to complete this project. No gift is too small or too large, and the brochures you received in the mail (or which are available at the tables) reflect our deliberate attempt to provide a variety of sponsorship opportunities for portions of the organ or casing.

No, it will not be easy to raise \$650,000, but I trust in faith that we can do this. I invite you to prayerfully consider what type of sacrificial gift you can make to this project, as well as to spread the word to others. Please consider giving, not out of your surplus, but sacrificially by means of your first fruits.

Throughout Lent, I invite you to stop by after Mass to St. Joseph's Chapel, where you may begin to see for yourselves the many ways you, your family and your friends can participate: diagrams show every pipe, pedal and stop. See the new organ console- choose your favorite sound or instrument. You can adopt a beautiful portion of the hand carved wood casing, knowing that each time you gaze up to the gallery, you played a part in this historic restoration and completion of a century old vision.

Yesterday, I visited the graves of Archbishop Ireland and E.L. Masqueray, praying to God for a successful completion to their century old vision. Imagine our joy on Easter when the organ sounds for the very first time, giving voice to our prayers as we raise our hearts and voices to almighty God, offering to Him our very best, the first fruits of our prayers and offerings.