

“THE JOY OF WRITING”: A “QUINCENTENARY” OF SORTS

While becoming a philosophy major wasn't exactly my idea, by spring semester of my **sophomore** year it became my **choice**. By then, I realized that the college seminary was **more** than a **passing** thought, but a sustained calling that needed to be fully explored. With encouragement from the seminary rector, I **switched** from Biology to Philosophy. The **very day** I made that change, I felt at **peace**. Among my favorite philosophers was **Aristotle** (384-322 BC), whose words ring true forty years after I first encountered them. I was especially intrigued by his discussion about **ultimate ends** and purposes, the quintessential philosophical query. The ultimate end is “that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else.” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk.1, Ch. 7) It raises the immediate question— “So, **what exactly** is desirable in itself and not for the sake of something else?” Drum roll please. The answer is simple— happiness. We seek **happiness** as an end in itself.

Sure, people have widely **divergent views** about what makes them happy. Is happiness to be found in **pleasure**? Many would agree, though the person of faith would see through the **fleeting nature** of pleasure and intuit that this does not guarantee happiness. Aristotle even provided an example, writing “for as it is not one swallow or one fine day that makes a spring, so it is not one day or a short time that makes a man blessed and happy.” (Ibid.) He was in search of a **complete** life. A blessed and complete life is not built upon **fleeting experiences**, no matter how engaging or pleasurable. It is about a **stable habit** of life that brings with it meaning. If I counted correctly, this week's column is the **500th** that I have provided for our bulletin. In Roman numerals— that's a “**D**.” My assignment began on **Sunday July 1, 2012**. I wrote an introductory column then, and to the best of my recollection, have not missed my “**bully pulpit**” since.

The temptation to take **short cuts** to fill column space, (i.e., cutting and pasting a papal document) is real. I've resisted with all my strength! (Sending an e-mail column from Nepal was tricky— where's wi-fi?) Though timely and informative, it remains true that it would be **someone else's** column, not mine. I have sought something different. **Why** do I **write** each week? When I became a pastor in 2006, my predecessor had written long weekly columns, and I needed to fill that space with something! But soon, I found myself enjoying it. Put simply, it gives me life; frankly, it **makes me happy** to do so! Do I believe the faithful derive as much benefit out of reading these columns as I do in writing them? **Nope!** I am not deluded! Nor am I ashamed to admit that **at times** I write for **myself**. That's right— it engages my mind and affords the opportunity to **delve** into topics and develop **themes** over time that are **difficult** to convey in a **homily**.

One perennial challenge of priestly ministry involves the ***munus docendi***, the formal term for the “teaching role” of priests. **Pope Benedict XVI** addressed this aspect of ministry in his Wednesday General Audience of 14 April 2010, and it is worth quoting at some length: “...the *munus docendi* of the Church, exercised concretely through the ministry of each priest, is particularly important. We are very confused about the fundamental choices in our life and question what the world is, where it comes from, where we are going, what we must do in order to do good, how we should live and what the truly pertinent values are. Regarding all this, there are numerous contrasting philosophies that come into being and disappear, creating confusion about the fundamental decisions on how to live...” He rightly highlighted the **importance** of passing along the **faith** in its **depth** and “making present, in the confusion and bewilderment of our times, the light of God's Word, the light that is Christ himself in this our world.” But **how** exactly do we share truths in an

engaging manner?

Historically, since weekday preaching was practically **non-existent**, much of a priest's teaching occurred during the **Sunday sermon**. They were often **quite long** and involved— Archbishop **Ireland** often preached for **30+ minutes**! Today, that would spell **disaster**. I agree with the advice of **Pope Francis** that Sunday homilies should strive to be **no more than ten minutes** in length. Not all agree, but I do because if a priest is well-prepared, he can **summarize** his key points and allow the liturgy (music, readings, prayers) to speak to the faithful. The **homily** is **not the main event**! For developing a theme in greater depth, a bulletin column affords me that opportunity. My Epiphany homily (ca. 800 words) two Sundays ago clocked in at **nine minutes**, while a typical column runs closer to **1250 words** and can be read at your leisure before Mass— or even **during** my homily if you are really **bored**!

I am quite cognizant that not every topic of interest to me, is as riveting to you! If you care little about baseball, geography, statistics, or Latin, no doubt I have **wasted** some of your precious time. Please know that I am open to **suggestions** for topics in future columns! I especially love topics that can develop as a **series**. Drop me an e-mail! Finding **connections** between the **sacred and secular** is a challenge that I enthusiastically accept, along with trying to avoid paragraphs with “orphan” words or excessive hyphenations! I hope you have found some benefit in these pages. Writing is truly a **labor of love**, and this “quincentenary” of sorts has provided me such joy. Thanks for reading!

- Pilgrim groups, students, families, and even curious onlookers gather at Noon **each Sunday** in St. Peter's Square for a papal address and blessing. In terms of Church history, it is not exactly an ancient custom! It began as a request by an Italian Catholic doctor who convinced his friend (who happened to be Pope Pius XII) to recite the **Angelus** publicly. He did so on **August 15, 1954**, the Solemnity of the Assumption. Vatican Radio broadcast it. Lo and behold, a custom was born. Watch a brief video about that [address here](#).
- The spread of the **Omicron variant** has many concerned as well as confused. While extremely contagious, thankfully it has been less lethal. I encourage two things: (a) please **spread out more** in Church. We have begun to congregate more towards the center sections. Let us take advantage of our space. Please consider **moving** towards the **Dayton Ave.** side of Church. (b) **Masks are encouraged**, though **not** required. Let us respect the individual decisions people make in this respect.
- At next Sunday's 10:00 a.m. Mass, **Archbishop Hebda** will bless a beautiful **new icon** of the **Conversion (Baptism) of Paul** that will find its home right here in the Cathedral. The icon is the fruit of the new partnership between our Archdiocese and the Archeparchy of Damascus (Maronite) in Syria.
- Join us this Saturday January 22 at 10:30 a.m. for the **Prayer Service for Life**. Let us implore God's blessing upon our efforts to witness to the sanctity of all human life, from the moment of conception. Saturday marks the **49th anniversary** of the tragic 1973 United States Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector

