

I hope that you all had a blessed and peace-filled Christmas. We in the Church are still celebrating Christmas Season which began Christmas Day and will end on New Year's Day with the celebration of Mary the Mother of God. This is called the "Octave" of Christmas; we celebrate eight days of Christmas Days. We do this as a reminder that the first Creation took God seven days but now with the birth of Jesus a "New Creation" has been established and it is more perfect than the first Creation, it is one better so to speak. The "Christmas Season" lasts until the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord on January 10th. So that while most of us have put away all the decorations and tossed the tree or put it into storage our celebrations here in the church still speak of Christmas and how Jesus is revealed to us and the world.

I think that we have all recovered from the so called "blizzard" of last Sunday and hopefully all the aches and pains are gone from all the snow removal that we had to do. The four o'clock Mass was heavily attended for many people anticipated the Sunday storm and came to church then. No one showed up for the 8:30 which was at the height of the storm and no one showed for the 10:00. Four people showed for the 11:30 including Fr. Buckley who braved the storm to come down because he did not get the message not to attempt to come down. When we have snowstorms on Sunday's like that the parish suffers very much financially. Very few parishioners "make up" for the offering they would have put in if they had attended Mass. Last winter we had three weekends in a row of bad weather as a result we experienced a significant financial crisis in the weeks that followed. We could not pay our electric and gas bills and various other vendors. We almost could not make payroll for our employees. I had to ask if one or more of us could delay our pay dates so that we could spread out the payroll until we had enough money. I was one of those "employees". Since I am the only full time person on staff and the pastor I felt I should take the lead in this. We got through the winter and I can say now that we have paid all our outstanding bills we incurred last winter as well as unpaid bills which went back to a year or more before I became you pastor with some clever financial work, the forgiveness of some debt from the archdiocese and an insurance settlement. All this was fortunate but it is no way to run the finances of a parish. The lifeblood of any parish is the offertory collection. After that grand annuals and from time to time capital campaigns and pledge funds which help with large and or specific projects.

When we have weekends such as last weekend we do need parishioners to make up for the weekend missed as well as other times through when you miss Mass or are away during the year. This is the only way that we can meet our day-to-day expenses of running a parish that consists of three buildings and extensive grounds, all of which are in continual need of upkeep. It is important that we realize that what is put into the collection basket is not an "admission" fee for Mass but a pledge and commitment to keep our parish up and running and financially sound. It is also the only way we can possibly make a yearly budget plan so that we can plan for the future of the parish and its needs and not find ourselves always in the "band aid" mode of operating.

Please, do what you can so that we can run a sound parish by remembering to make up for weeks that you are not here or put it all in at the beginning or end of the month, whichever is easiest for you. As ever I am grateful for the generosity and sacrifices you have made to Our Lady of the Lake Parish so that we can be a strong Catholic presence in Halifax and in this area of God's "vineyard". If we do not do this no one else will. We have already had several "reprieves" from the archdiocese in the forgiveness of debt in the past. When I was called up to the Pastoral Center last September with two others on our finance council for a meeting with archdiocesan finance representatives we were told that there would be no more assistance from them in the matters of helping us to keep this parish afloat. They are right, it is our responsibility. If we love this parish we will take that responsibility seriously.

Thank you and have a blessed Christmas season and a blessed and healthy New Year.

Fr. Healy