

March 15, 2020

A Note from Father Phil

I first met Fr Ron Schneider in the early 1970's. He was the new Associate Pastor at St Thomas the Apostle Church in Grand Rapids where my parents worshiped. It turned into a difficult assignment. The pastor, Fr Fred Voss, was diagnosed with brain cancer, and Fr. Ron insisted that he would be cared for in the rectory. Parishioners organized a schedule for the pastor's care, but much of it fell to Fr. Ron. This on top of all the parish ministry. Fr. Voss died peacefully where he wanted to—at the rectory surrounded by family and friends.

Fr. Ron's life and ministry were centered around compassion and the care of people: the poor, those who were hungry, the Spanish speaking, the incarcerated, the sick, minorities, and youth. Even took under his wing young Seminarians as I was when I met him. He made Matthew 25 come alive at the parishes he served. Among them were: St. Bartholomew in Newaygo, St. Thomas the Apostle in Muskegon Township, St. Gregory in Hart, St. Ann in Baldwin, and St. Ignatius in Luther.

Fr Ron spoke boldly about the social implications of the Gospel, but he was not a fiery prophet who spewed nothing but condemnation. He led by example. And he and his good friend, Fr. Joe Fix, were two of the biggest pranksters and jokesters in the diocese. They loved to tease each other and to fish and hunt and canoe together. When they were younger and healthier they would often take a novice or two with them to camp and canoe on some scarcely traveled river in Canada. I think they tried to scare the apprentice half to death. They got a kick out of it. On the other hand, they really did have some close calls. I seem to remember something about a waterfall.

Fr. Ron died last weekend. He was 79 years old and a Priest for nearly 53 years. He will be missed. Please keep him, his family and parishioners in prayer. Lent means prayer, fasting and almsgiving, but it also means baptism. Catechumens prepare to be baptized at Easter while most of us prepare to renew our baptismal commitments when we celebrate that Holiest Day. Kelsey Umlor, our sole catechumen, is now one of the elect. This happened at a ceremony at the Cathedral a couple of weeks ago where she met the Bishop who accepted her as a candidate for baptism in the Catholic Church. This weekend she will begin the first of three scrutinies. While these are done at the Sunday Mass, neither I, nor any parishioners, do the scrutinizing. Kelsey does that herself. It is an opportunity for her to really look at her life and discover what is motivating her. And what may be preventing her from knowing Jesus more intimately and following more faithfully. It would be well for all of us to scrutinize ourselves during this Holy Season. Why should Kelsey have all the fun?

Besides prayer, fasting, almsgiving and baptism, Lent is also about the Catholic Services Appeal (CSA). By now you are all familiar with the routine. Prayerfully consider your donation, fill out the pledge card even if you cannot contribute this year, and place it in the collection basket, mail it, or drop it off at the parish office. You can also contribute on line using the diocesan website: GRdiocese.org.