

Homily of June 15, 2003
by Fr. Brian Joyce

June 2003

This weekend marks Trinity Sunday and Fathers Day. Some preachers claim that there is nothing more difficult to speak about than the Trinity. I think I've found something much harder. I don't know if this will be a homily or more of a pastor's fireside chat , but I don't think its going to be much of a fathers day sermon or discussion of the Trinity - and it's going to be difficult.

This Thursday morning at 1:00 a.m. I was in Copenhagen, Denmark, along with my sister when I received a phone call that a lawsuit naming me had been filed and the press had been calling Christ the King. The insert in today's bulletin addresses that report. I hope you will take the time to read it carefully and I hope you will feel free to talk with me about it and to raise any concerns you may have. The core information is that the allegations being made stem from a friendship between two grown adults over 37 years ago, with extremely rare contact of any kind since December of 1969. Our Diocesan officials are fully informed and our Bishop, our lay review board and our Diocesan attorney feel there is no merit to the allegations or the case. The claim in some papers of a 38 year affair with someone whom I have not seen, not talked to or not heard from except very rarely since 1971 reminds me of our chancellor, Sr. Barbara Flannery's comment to the press: "I've learned what with the filing of these suits, you can pretty much say anything you want and not be accountable for what you say."

On my recent sabbatical, which was due to end next week, one of the delightful moments was being surprised with a two hour video put together by parishioners and friends to mark my 40th anniversary as a priest. Everyone interviewed was reminded that I often make three points in my homilies and then they were asked for three comments about me. The video includes my baby pictures, pictures of me as a baby priest and comments about me: mostly pro and occasionally but gently con. Well here are my three points for this weekend: first what really saddens me; then what gladdens me and then what heartens me (that is what gives me the heart to go on).

What saddens me are two things: the first a concern for myself and a little bit selfish - It saddens me that there is so much publicity and much of it erroneous at this random legal filing; and that when the case is discredited and dismissed, as I trust it will be, that will go largely unnoticed! News reports come quickly, but it often takes much longer for the truth to come out!

The second thing that saddens me is out of concern for very real victims of abuse. I

have talked with, and walked with, and worked with many abuse victims - both as a charter member of Battered Women's Alternatives in the 1980's and more recently amid the scandal of clergy abuse of minors. I know it is extremely hard for victims to step forward, to deal with their hurt, to be believed and to find healing. When cases like this one are filed and publicized on a questionable and flimsy basis it make it that much harder for victims to be heard and to be helped - that saddens me, that saddens me.

There are two things today that gladden me: the first is the understanding and objective support of our Diocese at the very time it continues to hold clergy accountable, to forbid "cover-ups" and to surface and serve victims of abuse. Through its officers and lay review board, it has listened to her and listened to me and judged these allegations of abuse to be without merit.

The second and far more important thing that gladdens me is the understanding and support of you our parishioners. I'm sure the news reports have left some of you dismayed, disappointed and even angry - and I want to accept, honor and respect those feelings - but the comments, calls and letters and messages to our website of full support have been overwhelming. I'm glad I've been here for a full fifteen hears, because by now no matter what legal briefs or press reports may say, you know me for who I am and what I am like. That gladdens me, that gladdens me.

Finally there are two things that hearten me, that give me the heart to go on.

I spent a good part of my sabbatical on the East Coast and while I was back there I heard about a bishop who had accepted the resignation of an elderly pastor: but because the man was healthy, experienced and wise, he asked him to take the title dean and serve as supervisor or mentor for five neighboring parishes. After a few years he asked how the parishes were doing. The dean replied, "Four of them are doing well, but the fifth isn't." After a moments thought the Bishop asked what standard and measure do you use for deciding that. He answered, "Well, in four of the parishes the people know God loves them, but in the fifth parish they're not so sure!" You are a community and people who know that God loves you, even and perhaps especially in the difficult times, and we've had some difficult times. And I know that God loves me, even with all of this going on - I know it because of you - that heartens me.

The second thing that gives me heart has to do with making a difference. One message I have consistently preached and underlined is that it is not enough for us to have faith and believe; we must also make a difference in our world. Well I know that whatever my weakness and shortcomings, over the years I have made a difference: walking with people who are hurting, standing by people as they mourn, journeying with people as they return to faith and Church, enabling people to do ministry, teaching and celebrating our faith in a way that is credible, challenging and exciting. I know I have

made a difference because you've told me so - and you've reminded me how much I absolutely love being a parish priest - because I've made that difference not alone but with you, along side you and because of you - and that heartens me, that heartens me. You hearten me! Amen.

Brian