

## Homily of Fr. Joseph R. Upton

*Final Masses at St. Francis in Wakefield and St. Romuald in Matunuck*

June 13 & 14, 2015

In 1989, Robert Fulghum wrote a book that would stay on the New York Times bestseller list for several years. The book was called *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. The concept is clear enough from the title: the best advice we've ever received came early in our lives and was likely very simple. Share everything; play fair; don't hit people; put things back where you found them; clean up your own mess. All that advice applies well into adulthood. And I'd add two more: say sorry when you need to and always say thank you.

So on this, my last weekend at St. Francis and St. Romuald, I'd like to keep it simple, and since I really don't like goodbyes, I'll say only those two things: I'm sorry and thank you.

First, "I'm sorry." The priesthood of Jesus Christ, which brought me to this wonderful parish and into your lives, is truly a magnificent thing. To love with the heart of Christ himself is no small task. It is a vocation of high ideals and lofty values. I've had my fair share of off-days and I've had a lot to learn. So if you ever caught me on a day when I could have been more patient, or more understanding, or more attentive, I'm sorry. God deserves our very best and so do his people.

But therein lies the beauty of this priesthood which I have been so blessed to share in these past five years. Our failures and weaknesses remind us every single day that it is God's grace at work in us that can accomplish more than we could ever ask or imagine. I'm reminded, too, of a passage that Fr. Nick offered as his first piece of advice to me on the day of my ordination. St. Paul said it two thousand years ago and it rings just as true today as the day he said it: "God's grace is sufficient for me, for his power is made perfect in weakness. I willingly boast of my weakness, that the power of Christ may dwell in me."

Admittedly, I'm more willing to believe those words today than I perhaps was when I first came here. But this parish was my testing ground, my first school of "practical theology," and there were bound to be mistakes and foibles! If you happened to be on the receiving end of one of them over the last five years, I'm sorry!

But the second thing I'd like to say to each and every one of you is "thank you." Of course I'm grateful for the many personal kindnesses that so many have shown me throughout my time here. I have been challenged to give more generously, to love more deeply, because of your lived example of faith and charity. In that sense, you have truly ministered to me. But more importantly, thank you for

inviting me into your lives: into your moments of joy and sorrow, into your moments of elation and grief.

There is nothing more humbling and more exhilarating about the priesthood than standing at the point of contact between Christ and his people. Your generosity in inviting me into your lives was really an expression of your desire for Christ, which is why the priesthood will always be desperately needed and gratefully cherished. So thank you for giving me that privilege of bringing the grace of Christ to the moments when you needed his healing, his peace, his reassurance, the most. For that, I will be eternally grateful. "I can no other answer make but thanks. And thanks, and ever thanks," to borrow a line from Shakespeare.

I see now that priestly assignments begin with great energy and a certain unsophisticated zeal, but they conclude with deep reflection and joyful gratitude. One chapter ends and another begins. Such is life. People come and people go. Only God is forever. And if we have been blessed enough to be bound together—my life and yours—in his divine life, then we'll never be far from one another. And the goal of all our praying and worshipping together, our working and learning together, our crying and celebrating together, will be realized in that kingdom which we seek not by sight but by faith; that kingdom under whose branches all can find rest and in which we—Christ's priests and his people together—are eternally at home.

Since I like to end where I begin, I'll leave the last thought to Robert Fulghum. In another wonderful passage from the book I already mentioned, he writes: "Every person passing through this life will unknowingly leave something and take something away. Most of this 'something' cannot be seen or heard or numbered...It's what we leave in the minds of other people and what they leave in ours. Memory. The census doesn't count it. Nothing counts without it."

So for all of the memories we've shared together and made together, with deep affection and great love, I will always be indebted to this community and to almighty God. He is both the keeper and originator of our deepest and most significant memories. Nothing counts without him, and memories made in him never fade. So may the God of our every beginning and of our every ending, bless you richly now and always! Amen!