

Fr. John Homily

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time, February 27, 2022

Community.

I'm sure I mentioned to you in the past that I was a pilot for a while. A student pilot. I never did get my license, but I had fun trying. (I took out some of my flying paraphernalia to use as props today.) But I soloed at Willow Run. I did my cross country flight from Ann Arbor to Muskegon to Gladwin and back. And I didn't get lost. I never crashed an airplane. During my two years of flying, I had one little claim to fame. It was only witnessed by two people. Myself and the instructor. I did something very rare. I made a perfect landing. What is a perfect landing? That's when you don't realize that your plane has landed. No chirp of the tires as they meet the runway. No bouncing. No rumble of the plane on the pavement. It just kind of dawns on you: My goodness, I've landed! I was pretty impressed with myself. I looked over at the instructor and he just said, "Beginner's luck".

There are stories that circulate about people and their flying experiences and I have one I would like to share with you. I got this from Father Lobert who did get his license and did some very serious flying. It's about a particular scenario that a pilot may have to deal with called *Engine Failure /Night flying*. You're flying along at night, and suddenly the engine sputters and dies. What do you do?

Well, we are trained to go to a checklist in our flight manual. You page through to "Engine Out". Subheading "Night Flying".

First thing on the checklist:

1. Maintain control of the aircraft. Fly the airplane. Keep calm. Don't panic. You're losing altitude so keep the nose down to avoid stalling. Watch your Instruments. Keep the wings level. You don't want to go into a spin.

2. Apply flaps.60 knots best glide speed. Flaps increase lift and give you more time in the air. Time that you may need.

3. Check throttle. You may have accidentally bumped it or maybe it vibrated into a position that would cause power loss.

4. Check fuel supply lever. Down there between the seats is a lever that turns the fuel off and on. Maybe you caught it with your heel or a strap from your flight back.

5. Finally the last thing on the checklist. Seems kind of strange.

Turn on landing lights. Look out front window. Hmmm?! But in parentheses just below it says, If you don't like what you see, turn off landing lights.

6. Enjoy the rest of your flight.

I thought of that story when I opened up the lectionary for today's readings. I did not like what I saw and so I closed the book. I think the spirit was telling me to pick up a new heading and fly in another direction.

Today I want to talk to you about community. Without having looked at the official dictionary definition, I would say that a community is a gathering of like-minded people (hopefully) working toward a common good. The word “hopefully” in parentheses.

When we talk of community we necessarily have to go back to its origins. That is the Blessed Trinity. Father and Son, and flowing from the love between them, the Holy Spirit. God is a creator. He made the universe, and our little corner of it. A perfect home for those who He would eventually make in His own image and likeness. And isn't it interesting that when the Son eventually came into the world to repair the damage we had done, He came as a carpenter. A builder, a restorer, a refinisher, a remodeler.

And so the first creation was the first community. A husband and a wife, and the children that flowed from their love for each other. After that groups of people came together in communities called towns and cities. Laws were established for the common good. Ultimately there was another community called the church. Remember, the words of Jesus, “upon this rock I will build my church.” And through His life gave us guidelines, no, make that commandments, by which that community could flourish. And we, here at Holy Spirit, are a local outpost in the vast community of believers which has spread to every corner of the world.

Now, you may have heard that the sources of all temptation are the World, the Flesh and the Devil. I think all those can work together and conspire to ruin community.

Let me give an example at the most basic level. The level of the family. A young and single man takes a job which takes him around the world. He makes great money, and it's pretty exciting. Lots of opportunity for various international experiences.

He eventually gets married and begins to raise a family. But his work takes him away from his family. There are stressors which nibble away at the community. The man in his loneliness in a hotel room in Hong Kong watches something on TV that he shouldn't and perhaps it goes beyond that to other things as well. Back home, the wife and children struggle without the presence of dad. Community is slowly being destroyed. And needless to say there are plenty of other stressors that affect the community of the family. It draws husbands and wives away from each other and away from their children.

We can continue to draw analogies about what's happened in our culture but let's focus today on this community of believers we call Holy Spirit Parish. We are unique, as is every Catholic parish. We are small as far as parishes go, and yet we were still pretty diverse. While we have a lot of faithful seniors, we do have a lot of younger families as well. We have a school. We have a personality and a character all of our own. We have had people come through who said they felt a special spirit here as soon as they walked in the front door. We have many positive qualities. Different types of ministries that serve our church community and the community that surrounds us namely, Green Oak Township, and beyond.

But I don't think it is all positive. The World, the flesh, and the Devil can, and do, take its toll within this Community as with any other community as well. In one sense, we have been very blessed. I would say that we have a very good staff here at Holy Spirit Church. And I can assure you that is not the case everywhere. I count my blessings as the pastor, the captain, the pilot of this ship.

And as I have said so many times, you are very generous here at Holy Spirit in sharing your time, talent and treasure. But it goes without saying that not everybody is on the same page. On the one hand, we do have people who literally consider this a second home. Their parish home. They are actively involved in one way or another, to varying degrees, in the life of our community. They serve on finance councils or parish councils, the parent teacher association, they knit blankets for the homeless, they collect Food at Christmas and Easter. They weed our garden out there in the summertime. They have joined our women's guild and our Saint Joseph guild. They clean our church and they are sacristans, ushers, Eucharistic ministers and lectors. They visit the homebound. They sing in our choir. They organize picnics. There are even some here who actually go out into the surrounding community, into the homes of the needy to see how they/we can be of help. I am talking about the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the most difficult and challenging ministry here at Holy Spirit.

But on the other hand, there are those who come here for the obligatory one hour out of their week. And they may not even be registered members of this or any other parish. And they may not drop anything in the collection basket. And they might leave early to go to the restaurant. On the other hand, again, there are many people who, because of circumstances, cannot participate to the degree that we would like. Age, infirmity, family life, all of these can affect the ability of anybody to participate in the community life here at Holy Spirit. On the other hand again, we are not a neighborhood parish. Although it is changing, we have been more of a rural parish. At one point we were even called the parish of many Zip Codes. People came from many miles around to come to this parish for specific reasons. It can be difficult, if you live far away, to participate in any regular way, in the life of the spirit community.

So, as you can see, it is very very difficult to establish, maintain, grow and thrive as a parish. My task, as pastor, CEO and as captain of this ship is to do what I can to strengthen our community. To make it be all that it can be. And as you have heard me say before, a major part of my task is to prepare us all for the second coming of Jesus. Whenever it may come.

We will have to prepare in different ways. Certainly the spiritual is the most important. We need greater participation in the spiritual life of this parish. A good place to start would be Eucharistic adoration every Friday from nine am till nine pm. And the austerities of Lent will also provide us with a great opportunity to build upon our spirituality.

This is a big subject. And there is a lot more to say, and much more to do, as we continue our journey, as a community, into the future. So now, in closing, let me leave you with a few final words:

Your captain has put on the fasten seatbelts sign.

There is heavy turbulence ahead.

So be prepared, cause it's gonna get bumpy.

And enjoy the rest of the flight.

Fr. John