

Farewell Homily
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 1, 2021

A sincere thank you to those who just made presentations on behalf of the parish and groups. Your lavish praises made me wonder if you and I are thinking of the same person? And thanks to all of you for the most generous gift! It is overwhelming. I know it is a custom but I really do not expect such things. But that you choose to give it makes it both easily accepted and deeply appreciated.

Of all the homilies that I have had to prepare and preach at Saint John the Apostle, this one that I give today is perhaps the most difficult. It is an emotional one. For this is the last time I will speak to you from this ambo, this pulpit, as your pastor.

Winnie the Pooh once said, "How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard." Pooh Bear is right. Saying goodbye is never easy but is made that much more difficult when you have gotten to know and care about the people God has put into your life. And it is not a one-way street. I have experienced the same from you.

What can I say? There are not enough words of gratitude to be said for having had the opportunity to come to Saint John the Apostle. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for how good you have been to me, for allowing me into your lives, for accepting me as your pastor.

I have considered it a privilege and a pleasure to have been your pastor these past six years and to have contributed in any small way to your walk with God. I have come to realize what a wonderful parish you are and how lucky I am.

It is a shame that this COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all our lives so profoundly and reduced our opportunities to be with each other this last nearly year-and-a-half. What a sizable chunk of our time together!

But with the creativity and commitment of certain parishioners, opportunities were made for us to keep in some contact. A deep note of gratitude to those who made it possible.

Looking over the 55 years that this parish has existed, St. John the Apostle has had some fine pastors. From the first, Father John Whelan, who built the church, to Msgr. Joe Muldoon, Father Frank Scott, and more. They shared their lives with you until each was eventually called to go elsewhere. But the parish survived their leaving, hopefully having been built up a bit more by their presence.

It is as Saint Paul once told the Corinthians: *"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth"* (1 Cor. 3: 5-7).

The same is true of parish priests. Father Whelan planted and others watered, but it is God who gives the growth. Whether it be the progress of our own individual faith lives or our community faith life, God is the

One who makes it possible. Without Him we can do nothing. And so, all praise properly belongs to Him.

This may not be the “perfect” time for a change of pastors but with God’s help I know that we can make the best of it. Ultimately, with our faith in Jesus Christ we don’t need to know the future; we simply need to trust and follow Him.

And I know you will welcome Father Emeka with the same open arms, love, and support with which you welcomed me. I can tell you from personal experience, it makes all the difference in the world. God often shows His love through the good people He places in our path. We are molded by the love, the care and the concern of others.

These past six years have a special place in my 25 years as a priest. But no one is always at their best. And so, I must apologize for the times as your parish leader that I may have let you down, failed to be there when you needed me, or said something silly and insensitive. For these and any other faults on my part I am truly sorry.

My goal has always been to model my ministry on the words of Saint Paul: *“For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.... But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us”* (2 Cor. 4:5,7).

I cannot begin to name all the people whom I would like to thank for their help and cooperation over the years. Without them I could not

have managed. People notice priests because we are the ones who stand in front of them every Sunday, preach and lead them in worship. So we get a lot of credit; often more than we deserve.

But it is the many parishioners who have lower profiles, who often work behind the scenes as staff and volunteers, as members of the Pastoral Council, the Finance Council, the Building and Grounds Committee, as sacristans, counters, altar servers, and readers, as ushers and side-door greeters, Extraordinary ministers of Communion, musicians and choir members, with the Knights of Columbus, the Catholic Women's League, and the Legion of Mary, with Children's Liturgy, Sacramental Preparation and the Liturgy Committee, with Pastoral Care and the Bereavement Group, with Social Outreach, the New Evangelization Group, and the Pro-life Ministry – these and others still keep this church active, engaged and running smoothly. And they will continue to do so in the future.

And it is all of you, who through your presence, prayers, faith-commitment, and financial support keep this parish alive and able to continue its mission. I want to thank each and every one of you for making Saint John's such a hard parish to leave.

But one never completely leaves a place like Saint John's. Something of oneself is left behind and something of it is brought with you. I leave behind my work here. I take with me many fond memories. I will remember you. I promise to keep you in my prayers. Please keep me in yours.

But I leave everything as it has always been...in the hands of God. We place our trust in Him. With this in mind I would like to end with a quote from the prophet Jeremiah: *“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’.*”

Thank you everyone. Goodbye and God bless.