

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

What an exciting time to be a member of the Church, established by Jesus Christ! It's the best thing that could happen in a person's life. I know it's the best thing that ever happened in my life.

There's a story told of a young high school football star who was being recruited by a coach from top ranked Florida State University. The coach had never seen the young man play, so he asked him a few direct questions. "Son, I hear you've played quarterback for your team. Are you a good quarterback?" "Well," the young man replied, "I threw the ball 100 times this season and had only one incomplection, but that's because the receiver tripped."

The coach was impressed, "I understand that you also play defense. How did it work out for you on defense?" The boy said, "I did manage to sack the quarterback three times each time I played defense."

"Wow," said the coach, "They tell me you can punt too. Is that true?" "Yes, sir! I really had trouble holding back on my punts because I tended to kick the ball into the stands."

The coach was thrilled. "Tell me, Son, do you have any weaknesses?"

The boy thought for a moment and replied, "Well, I do have a tendency to exaggerate a little."

That young man may have overstated his abilities more than a little. And there may be some who will accuse me of exaggerating the contributions of those whom we honor today in our FESTIVAL OF GRATITUDE, but, truth be told, I cannot begin to overstate the contributions that Fr. John, Joan Halter, and Dee Cain have made to our parish.

Did you know that the word, *ENTHUSIASM*, comes from two Greek words, *en* and *theos*, which literally translated means *IN GOD*? That is what each of these disciples of Christ has brought to their individual ministries, ENTHUSIASM! Each has enthusiastically embraced the ministry they had been given, and, in so doing, manifested the presence of God in our midst.

Twenty-three years ago, Joan offered to assist Fr. Schneider with some filing, and because of the enthusiasm with which she assisted, she became the face of welcome, the voice of comfort, and the scheduler-in-chief of all parish functions and events. You've all had the opportunity to read my somewhat verbose, but truly heart-felt tribute to Joan in the bulletin and on our website. The bottom line is when things worked well in our parish, it was thanks to Joan. When they didn't, it was usually because I messed up somewhere.

Again, twenty-three years ago, Dee Cain accepted the position of Co-ordinator of Religious Education. When she began, I believe they were still offering C.C.D. classes in the now-demolished wreck of a house on Third Ave. Since then, Dee has recruited and trained literally hundreds of volunteer C.C.D. teachers, and been responsible for the teaching of the faith to at least 10,000 of our youngsters, as well as assisting hundreds of couples celebrate the baptism of their children. And she did all that while raising and home-schooling her two beautiful daughters, now college graduates, who were always her strong right and left arms; caring for and loving Jim through his illness and recuperation; and caring for her sick and dying Mother. But, above all, Dee has been a great woman of faith and a true prayer warrior.

Eighteen years ago, I invited Fr. John to visit our parish. Since he was retired, I told him he could do whatever he liked doing and didn't have to do anything he didn't want to. He chose to do a great deal. He became a regular part of our rotation of presiding at our Masses. He saw the dilapidated condition of our St. Malachy Church and went to work restoring it. When I saw the need for running water and bathroom facilities out there, he tiled the floor, as he did in the 3rd floor bathroom of the Rectory, though he had never done any tiling work before. He ran a roller skating rink for a number of years to the delight of many of our youngsters. And most appreciated by me, he became a companion to Fr. Schneider until his retirement to St. Joseph's Villa. Beyond all of that, Fr. John has called all of us to serve "the least of our brethren" with a missionary's zeal.

As we eavesdrop on Jesus' prayer in our Gospel text today, we hear Him praying for the Church...we hear Him praying for us, "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for the ones you have given me, because they are yours, and everything of mine is yours and everything of yours is mine, and I have been glorified in them. And now I will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world, while I am coming to you."

Do you hear what Jesus says of us? "I HAVE BEEN GLORIFIED IN THEM".

Yes, He has! It is very obvious to all of us that He has been glorified in the works of Fr. John and Joan and Dee. But, he sees himself being glorified in all of us who are his disciples who "are in the world".

It's not enough for us to be excited about the works they have done or the work of Pope Francis or the other luminaries of our Church. We have to be excited about the work that each of us does in the Church. We have to become excited about the privilege we have been given to be called into the Church of Jesus Christ.

Following Jesus is the most thrilling business in the world. God has entrusted you and me with the work of bringing this beaten and battered world into a right relationship with Him. He has called us to bring abundant life to hearts that are cold and uncaring. He has offered us the possibility of being part of the building of God's Kingdom in this world. Doesn't that make you feel really good inside? Or are you like that man who went into a hotel and asked for a bottle of Old Squirrel whiskey?

When the bartender replied that he didn't have any Old Squirrel, but that he did have some Old Crow, the man said, "No, I don't want to fly. I just want to jump around a little".

Forgive me that, but it makes the point that there's a vast difference between people who want to fly and people who just want to jump around a little. Our spirits ought to soar when we contemplate the great honor that God has bestowed upon us—the honor of being called God's own people and being entrusted by God to reconcile the world to Himself.

If we really want to express our gratitude for the ministries of Fr. John, Joan Halter, and Dee Cain, each of us might want to enter that "upper room" with the Apostles and Mary, our Mother, and devote ourselves to pray with one accord until next Sunday, the Day of Pentecost, that the Holy Spirit will stir up, excite within us the desire to serve with the same enthusiasm and faithfulness which they have so wonderfully modelled for us, that the Lord might be glorified in each of us.

Fr. John! Joan! Dee! THANK YOU!!!