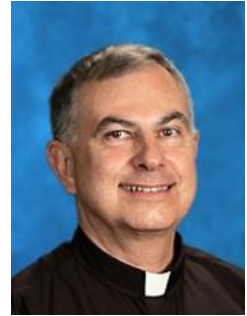


Fr. Mark's Remarks- December 23/30, 2013

For all of our masses at Christmas and the Epiphany, our parish will have Greeters at our church doors as a part of our Hospitality Ministry. I would like to call this a 'new' ministry, but actually it's not. It is a response -- an answer -- to a call of the Gospel. It is an outreach to help us build an even stronger parish community, one in which we warmly greet each other and welcome our many visitors.



Throughout scripture we find references to the greeting of guests from Abraham welcoming three strangers in Genesis 18:1-8 to Jesus telling us in Matthew 25:35 *"I was...a stranger and you welcomed me."* Part of the legend we recall during this Christmas season is that of a busy Bethlehem innkeeper finding room in his stable for Joseph and his very-pregnant wife, Mary. We know the rest of the story.

Our Catholic Bishops published a key document in 2000 *"Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity"*. They teach us that hospitality is but one of the imperatives flowing out of our baptismal call. Last month at Thanksgiving and then again this week for Christmas, we welcome family and friends into our homes and to our tables for festive dinners and grand celebrations. It is with this same warmth and enthusiasm that we greet you and, likewise, encourage you greet each other as we come together to celebrate Jesus' Eucharistic feast. Our churches are our second home.

When we have a parish community with two churches, 8 weekend masses, thousand of parishioners including hundreds of MSU students and 3,500 registered households; it can be challenging to come to know one another. Blessed Mother Teresa said, *"Every time you smile at someone, it is an action of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing."*

In addition to the Greeters at the church entrances, we will have a Hospitality Table which includes parish registration packets, program brochures, and special form people can fill-out to request more information or a follow-up from our parish staff and ministries.

If you would like to join our Hospitality Ministry, please call the parish office and they will have one of the organizers contact you. The blessings and benefits from establishing this ministry will be significant. Blessed Mother Teresa also said, *"Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile."* Help us make our parish grow and glow!
Amen

On behalf of the priests, deacons, sisters and the entire staff at St. Thomas Aquinas/St. John Church & Student Center,

Merry Christmas and many blessings in the New Year!