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In 1917, the world was in crisis. The Great War - the so-called “war to end all wars” - projected at its outbreak to have the boys home by Christmas, had, for the past 3 ½ years, engulfed all of Europe, Russia and the Middle East. The United States, protected by two oceans and swayed by isolationist sentiment, had remained uncommitted to the war.

But, by April, 1917, the obvious had become the inevitable. We could no longer remain disengaged from the conflict raging in much of the rest of the world. And so, on April 6, 1917, the United States entered World War I.

That same month of that same year, the mission of St. Joseph, overseen by priests from Mary Immaculate of Lourdes in Newton, became St. Joseph Parish. An organized Catholic community had already been in Needham for decades. The church building, dedicated in 1894 and rebuilt after the fire of 1913, was deemed unsafe only four years later, and would be replaced in 1918 by a handsome, brick, Gothic-style church. Many of you remember that former building, torn down in 1964, to make room for this new, post-Vatican II church.

But, for a moment, let’s travel back to 1917, and ask ourselves about the members of the newly-established St. Joseph Parish. What was in their minds and hearts as they looked to an open future in a world at war? What were they thinking as they were entering a new world that would never again permit them the comfort of isolationist safety? What were their hopes and dreams for themselves, for their children? For their new parish?

Where did they go for the insight, for the strength to go forward with their lives in faith and hope? We know the answer to that question because they went to where we are right now. They went to the Lord in his Church. They went to the Lord in his Holy Eucharist. I want you to think about that for a moment. Think about those generations nourished and strengthened here, on this same property, on this sacred ground, in this sacred event called the Eucharist.

The Church teaches us that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. All the other good and necessary ministries, all the good and necessary programs of education and social outreach, are only authentically of the Lord if they flow from the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Christian life. This is why we work so hard in our parish to ensure that our celebration of the Eucharist will be authentic and reverent and beautiful, according to the mind of the Church.

This is the source to which I come – to which you come - when you and I need assurance that the Lord is with us, when we need to have our hope strengthened as we



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stand before an uncertain future. This is the source to which I come – to which you come – when life is almost unbearably stressful with the responsibilities before us; in the times when I – and you - grieve the loss of the ones we love; in the times when I – and you - feel hurt and misunderstood and judged unjustly by others; in the times when I – and you – rejoice with the good and beautiful things of life – the joys, the blessings of family, of friends, of love and of success.

We come here – to the Eucharist – to the source and summit of the Christian life – because this is where we need to be. And let's be entirely honest with ourselves. We're not here to do God any favors. We're here because we need to be here by God's mercy. Because we know that the grace that God gives to transform us - to change our hearts – the grace to save us from our sin - that grace is offered here at the Eucharist, the source and summit of the Christian life.

And we go forth from here, nourished, changed to live as Christ would have us live. As his witnesses, as his presence in the world.

Today's gospel is a challenging one. Its teaching is clear. We're called to care, to help anyone in need. To see as Jesus sees. To love as Jesus loves. To do what Jesus did. We share the rich man's burden in today's gospel, not because we have a lot of money, necessarily, but because we claim to follow Jesus. And there's a stark reminder of judgment in today's gospel. In the afterlife, the situation is reversed. Lazarus is blessed in the bosom of Abraham, and the rich man is not. The Lord will ask us to account for ourselves in this life. Did we live as he commands us to live?

Ninety-nine years after 1917, our parish is at the threshold of a special time of grace - a Centennial of Faith – our 100th anniversary.

Let's not let this be just a symbolic number for self-congratulations. Let's make this anniversary what it can, and should, be – a special time of grace, a time of God's spirit alive in our parish. A time to look back with gratitude and praise for what God has done, a time to take stock of where we are, a time for renewal in the things of the Lord, and a time to look forward in faith and hope to the challenges of the years to come.

I like to joke and say that, when I left my last parish to come here, I got supersized. This parish is big. And it's complex. And very busy. What a blessing we have in the extraordinary dedication of my brother priests and their ministry of word and



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sacrament and pastoral care! And what a blessing we have in watching our seminarians move on to ordination to the diaconate and priesthood!

What a blessing we have in the competence and caring hearts of the staff members who work here, in the love you - the parishioners who serve here, who worship here, who support this parish with your time and presence and with your treasure. We are blessed, indeed!

Let me offer you a thumbnail sketch of some of this year's parish statistics. Needham is a very mobile community. So far this year, we've had 72 new families or individuals register at St. Joseph's. We've also had 54 families or individuals who have moved away. That's a net gain of 18. So far this year, we've celebrated 54 funerals and 33 baptisms.

We have 396 students in our Elementary School and 143 students in our Middle School. We have 713 students in our Religious Education program. We have 95 tenth-grade students preparing for Confirmation next fall. That's up by 15 from this present class of 80 young men and women who will be confirmed next month. We have 140 second-grade children preparing for First Communion in May. That's up 10 from last year.

So far this year, we've given about \$15,000 through our Neighbors in Need program to help others in our local community. We also have a parish Charitable Giving fund to help those who seek our support for their worthy projects and programs.

This is just a thumbnail sketch of St. Joseph's. This is our parish with its blessings and challenges.

And now, I must turn to you to ask for your help. With all that is happening here, I need to ask you to be generous in your support - extra generous this coming year, especially.

Your first and most important support is to do what you're doing right now - to participate fully in the Sunday Mass. That's the most important support any Pastor must first ask from his parishioners - regular attendance and full and active participation at Mass and the other sacraments, and, then, in the life of the parish.

But I also need to ask for your financial support for our parish. This is going to be a demanding year. Our expenses continue to increase, but our weekly offertory has been



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flat for a few years, and our Grand Annual has gone down. You can see the offertory deficit printed each week in the bulletin. I need to ask you to be extra generous.

I'm not asking for big donations from everyone. I know that that's not possible. But I am asking every parishioner to do the best that he/she can in participating in the offertory and Grand Annual collection. Please don't sit this one out. And, if it's been a few years since you've increased your offertory or your Grand Annual donations - and you're able to increase what you give - I ask you to do it this year.

I always ask that your gifts be intentional and sustained. That is, that you make a prayerful decision, in advance, of what you are able to give, and that you give it on a sustained basis throughout the year, especially when you're away. Please don't forget us when you're away.

One easy way to do this is to sign up for online giving. In this week's bulletin, there's a flier insert about online giving. Next weekend, after all the Masses, someone will be here to help you sign up for online giving, or to sign up for offertory envelopes, or to register as a parishioner if you come here regularly. One stop shopping.

Finally, I must humbly ask for your generous support of our Capital Campaign. As of today, we're at almost \$2.1 million. If you've not yet made a contribution, I ask you to do so to the best of your ability. I know that I'm asking a lot. I've made my own 3-year pledge to this Campaign. I ask you to join me in doing what the parishioners here have always done – build and improve this parish for the generations to come.

In today's second reading, Paul tells Timothy: Since you are of God, seek God's ways. Seek righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience and gentleness. Be faithful to the commands of God. Prepare well for eternal life.

Brothers and sisters, in the end, this is what we're all about. This is what St. Joseph Parish – what any parish – is all about. Let us rejoice in what God has given us in the past. With God's blessings, let us go forward, together.

Amen.

Rev. David C. Michael, Pastor