

Peace and Blessings! Dear brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Gratitude

I begin this weekly bulletin column by first giving thanks to the Lord for my vocation to the priesthood. On July 1, 2006, I was ordained A PRIEST FOREVER in Cartago, Costa Rica.

During my homily, I recalled some of the stations of my own "Way of the Cross"—the difficulties and trials of priestly ministry. For example, while serving in Nicaragua, I celebrated Sunday Mass with two police officers stationed at the entrance of the church. At the conclusion of every Eucharistic celebration, one of the officers would call me aside to question me about my homily. Afterward, he would take my photograph and require me to sign a document verifying that what I had preached matched the explanation I had given during the interrogation.

I bless the Lord for His mercy and goodness throughout these years of service to the Holy People of God, and for the gift of serving and accompanying this beautiful Parish of St. John the Baptist in Pawtucket.

I also extend a million thanks and God's abundant blessings to each one of you who joined me for the Eucharistic celebration. Thank you for your expressions of affection, your words of encouragement, and for all your hard work—especially the music, decorations, and the meal—that made it possible to celebrate with me God's precious gift: THE PRIESTHOOD!

Biblical Reflection on the Liturgy of the Word

Today's First Reading from Isaiah (55:10–11) can be understood as revealing the power of God's Word to change history. God's Word is not confined to the spiritual realm, although that is its natural home. Rather, it transforms the suffering reality of God's people, just as the rain nourishes the earth:

"Thus says the Lord: Just as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful..." (Isaiah 55:10)

The Word of God that comes upon His people brings both judgment and salvation. In today's reading, we encounter the beautiful truth that God's Word, like the rain and snow, never returns empty. The same is true of the Word proclaimed through the prophets. Human hearts—that is, each person—receive the spiritual rain and snow of God's Word through those who faithfully interpret God's will in both personal and communal life.

The Second Reading, from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (8:18–23), presents what we might today describe as an "ecological" text. St. Paul uses the Greek word *ktisis*, meaning "creation," referring to the created world in which we live.

Sadly, humanity often struggles to recognize the harm we inflict upon creation through pollution and environmental destruction. Paul offers a new understanding through Christ, who is the center of this Sunday's readings. Human sin is not limited to our interior lives; it also affects the created world. Nature itself suffers whenever humanity fails to fulfill the mission God has entrusted to us.

We are called to live in peace with creation. However, whenever we stray from God's plan of justice, harmony, and peace, the consequences of war, greed, and the accumulation of wealth by a few are reflected even in nature itself. We must never forget that creation is intimately connected to humanity's destiny. This is the foundation of a truly theological ecology.

The Gospel, the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1–23), introduces several Sundays of continuous Gospel readings in which Matthew presents a series of parables collected in Chapter 13.

When someone has only been able to offer 20 percent—or perhaps 30, 40, or even 60 percent—of his or her life to God, the Lord does not reject that person. Rather, He treasures even the smallest response to His grace. God's love for the men and women of this world does not despise what His love has produced, even if it falls short of what could have been.

Jesus' purpose in this parable is to reveal the power of the seed—the Word of God, the Gospel of life. Without that seed, without the message of grace and the Good News, there is no way for humanity to place its trust in God and remain faithful to Him. In this parable, Jesus sows the Gospel in contrast to the Law (the Torah). The Gospel teaches us that the seed is pure grace, whereas the Law places greater emphasis on measurable results and productivity.

Finally, I would like to encourage everyone to continue supporting our parish and its many important projects. We are currently repairing the church roof, a project that exceeds \$11,000, and we must also complete essential maintenance work in the boiler room. Because necessary maintenance was postponed over several years and several corroded pipes must be replaced, this project is expected to cost approximately \$5,000.

Each month, the parish takes up a special collection for maintenance and fuel (gas). I encourage you to consider giving a little more to this monthly collection so that we can continue addressing these important needs in our church.

At the same time, let us begin preparing for our Parish Ministry Fair this September. As a parish family, we should each ask ourselves:

How do I serve the Lord? As a lector, Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, usher, or catechist? Am I placing my talents at the service of the Lord?

Our parish also needs people with practical skills such as gardening, carpentry, masonry, electrical work, and many other talents.

I also encourage everyone to participate in daily Mass during the week and in our Eucharistic Adoration every Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

St. John the Baptist, pray for us.