

Welcome First Saturday Mass sponsored by the World Apostolate of Fatima, Saginaw Division.

In today's first reading, we hear a description of the Year of Jubilee. Every 49 years in the Jewish calendar all debts would be forgiven ... and the precious land - the inheritance of the the members of the Twelve Tribes of Israel would be returned to them ... and those who had sold themselves into slavery were to be set free.

Our Lord makes reference to this in the 4th chapter of St. Luke's Gospel when He says:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.*

This is significant, because the Jubilee that Christ brings is the return of our own birthright ... not property or land ... but rather our redemption which allows us to live in the freedom of the sons and daughters of God ... as well as freeing us from our own slavery to sin.

In essence, Fr. N. and Fr. N. and I have spent the previous hour in the confessional absolving those who came to confession ... from sin. Not by any virtue or power of our own, but through the ministry and by the authority of the Church as handed down by Jesus Christ Himself.

And while you may have had to wait several minutes or tens of minutes ... you didn't need to wait 50 years for this.

You also had the opportunity to pray the Rosary in community in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the Tabernacle. And you will have the opportunity to receive Holy Communion at this Mass.

Aside from being the conditions set forth by Our Lady for the Five First Saturdays - so you've fulfilled 20% of that ... you have the opportunity to receive a Plenary Indulgence ... because of praying the Rosary in the format which we did before Mass is part of the conditions for a plenary indulgence. This may be applied to yourself or to the deceased at your discretion.

In a sense, what we have been doing, even up to this point, has been a very powerful expression of God's mercy in our lives, in the life of our diocese, as well as for the Church and the world. Not to mention when we continue with the Mass - which is the supreme prayer of self-offering of Christ to the Father ... in an un-bloody sacrifice ... commemorating His self-gift on Calvary.

The Gospel today speaks of the death of John the Baptist as recounted in Matthew's Gospel. In a sense, Herod the Tetrarch was so tied up in trying to be something and someone he wasn't that he was hoodwinked by his second wife and her daughter into killing John the Baptist.

Not that he isn't culpable - but rather, he chooses to save face - to feed his ugly pride ... and ends up killing the messenger ... who brings him the tidings of God's mercy and the potential for the forgiveness of his sins.

Let us turn to Our Lady and beg for the graces to cast aside our own pride and not only to receive God's mercy and forgiveness, but also to be messengers of that mercy and forgiveness ... to a world that at times may prefer to cut off someone's head rather than to hear of such love ... but we are called to spread this Good News regardless of how it is received.

August brings with it many beautiful liturgical celebrations related to Our Lady.

Primarily, the middle of the month on August 15 is the Solemnity of Our Lady's Assumption ... body and soul ... into heaven. The day before is the Memorial of St. Maximilian Kolbe, who through his devotion to Our Lady, whom he called the "Immaculata" - or the "Immaculate One" ... sought to spread the Gospel using the available technology of his time ... despite opposition from the Nazi's ... which resulted in his eventual martyrdom.

One week after the Assumption, on August 22, is the traditional date set for the Immaculate Heart of Mary - which now is celebrated on the Saturday after the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart in June. August 22 in the current calendar is commemorated as "The Queenship of Mary," and is the Octave Day of the Assumption

Yesterday was the Franciscan Feast of "Our Lady of the Angels" which carries with it the annual indulgence attached to the "Little Portion" or "Portiuncula" ... the chapel in which St. Francis heard Our Lord call out to him from the crucifix to "Rebuild My Church."

Monday is the traditional feast of “Our Lady of the Snows” also known as the Dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome.

Near the end of the month is another Franciscan Feast of Our Lady ... the Feast of the Seven Joys of Mary.

Perhaps you are familiar with the Seven Sorrows ... or the Seven Dolours ... of Our Lady. That is commemorated on September 15, and is where we get the beautiful hymn often sung during the Stations of the Cross, titled “At the Cross Her Station Keeping.”

But on August 27, is the Feast of the Seven Joys of Mary.

And lest we get caught up in the insanity that pervades our world, and the constant onslaught of “bad news” in the media. Let us pause for a moment and meditate on just what are the “Seven Joys of Mary.”

There are a couple of ways to arrange the Seven Joys, and so I am going to go with the Franciscan rendering which is:

The Annunciation of the angel Gabriel of Mary.

The Visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth.

The Nativity of our Lord Jesus (Christmas).

The Adoration of the Magi (Epiphany).

The Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple.

The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus (Easter).

The Assumption & Coronation of Our Lady.

In essence, we need to recognize that the power of Our Lord’s Cross and Resurrection has freed us from our attachment to the world, and set us free to be the daughters and sons of God. In this, we become, as well, members of the family of God, adopted brothers and sisters of Christ, and as such - children of our Blessed Lady.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ - let us always remember that He who is within us is stronger than that which is outside of us - namely the world, sin, and the prince of this world (the devil.)

Let us trust in God’s love, mercy, and forgiveness to transform us ... and through us to transform the world. The power we wield through prayer and perseverance will most certainly result in the Triumph of Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart.