

# **Liturgical Moments**

**St. Joseph Parish**

**Fall 2023**

## Week 1: October 15, 2023

Good morning/evening! I am (say your name) and I serve (as a lector/ on the Liturgy Committee/ on the Vision Committee – pick one to identify yourself). We are going to revive our Liturgical Moments for the next six weeks. So, after each liturgy, someone will read a brief reflection that will help to deepen our common faith in the liturgy and explain what we do when we gather for mass each week.

As you may remember, our Liturgical Moments came from a request by the parish Vision Committee that the parish provide some formation opportunities for all of us to better understand and appreciate our liturgical life together. The Liturgy Committee responded to this request by sharing six reflections last spring, during Lent, about different aspects of the liturgy. Last spring, we relied heavily on this book (hold it up), MASS CLASS by Fr. Dave Dwyer for the topics we addressed. You might also remember that we gathered feedback afterwards on small purple surveys in the pews.

Your feedback and suggestions are going to shape our Liturgical Reflections for this fall. In fact, some suggestions have already been implemented – for example, one suggestion we received was a request that at the end of the petitions, also called the Prayers of the Faithful, that we include a petition for silent prayer, and Fr. Jim has been doing so for the past several months! We received questions about the ambo and the baptismal font that we will answer in upcoming weeks. Our focus this Fall will be on the precious objects we see in our beautiful church.

This church building was built in 1969, and the cornerstone in front which reads 1970, was installed during the dedication of the church in January of 1970. It is built in the shape of a cross – which is called a cruciform structure. The long center aisle forms one line of the cross, and the other line of the cross extends from side door to side door. (Gesture here if you are comfortable doing so) Where the lines intersect – our center – is the altar space which we gather around each week to be fed and sustained by the Word of God and the Body of Christ.

These Liturgical Moments are meant to offer all of us an opportunity to deepen our understanding of what we do together when we gather for mass each week. December of this year will mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second Vatican Council's Document on the Sacred Liturgy, and we are still striving to live into the vision promoted by it, that we all may be led to a "full, conscious and active" participation in the liturgy. Next week we will begin by talking about our baptismal font!

## Week 2: October 22, 2023

Good morning/evening! I am (say your name) and I serve (as a lector/ on the Liturgy Committee/ on the Vision Committee – pick one to identify yourself!) During today's Liturgical Moment we are going to talk about what Fr. Jim says is the topic of most questions at St. Joe's: – our baptismal font.

You'll remember that, last week, we said that our church building was built in 1970. However, it also underwent some significant renovations in the 1990's – which was when the font we see now was added. Since St. Joe's was built after the Second Vatican Council, as we can see from the placement of the altar table at the front of the sanctuary, you may wonder why the church needed renovations at all! Well, although the Second Vatican Council ended in 1965, the work of the Council continued for many years.

The Document on the Sacred Liturgy, for example, stated that the church needed to produce new Rites for the celebration of the sacraments. It took time to develop a new Rite for infant baptism, and a new rite for the baptism of adults being welcomed into the church. The goal in these new rites was to clarify everything that the church teaches so that we can all more easily understand, not just through the words but also through the symbols and actions, what our sacraments really mean. To clarify the centrality of baptism, the font was moved to where it is today – at the front door.

The placement of our font reminds us that baptism is our first sacrament. Baptism is the promise to each baby and to each baptized adult that you belong. You belong to this church, to this community, on account of your baptism. Our font reminds us that the reason we are here, the reason we walk through the doors of the church each week, is because we are baptized. Baptism unites us with the whole community of the baptized because it has united each of us to Christ. We were united with the Body of Christ when we were baptized “in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” We are reminded of our baptism each time we enter our church and bless ourselves from the

font. Through the waters of baptism, we are all reborn and made into a new creation and as St. Peter tells us “We now are the people of God.” (1 Pet 2:10.)

Our baptismal font, you will notice, has eight sides – it is shaped like an octagon. The eight sides make sense when we recall that God created the world in seven days – and that through our baptism, we are united with the new creation in the body of Christ. The placement of our font by the doors invites us to stop – as we would at an eight-sided Stop sign -- bless ourselves with the waters of baptism, and remember who we are – we are part of the new creation, members of the Body of Christ and the people of God in this life and the next.

### Week 3: October 29, 2023

Good morning/evening! I am (say your name) and I serve (as a lector/ on the Liturgy Committee/ on the Vision Committee – pick one to identify yourself!) I am here to read this week's Liturgical Moment, which will answer a question we received last spring when we asked for feedback after our first set of Liturgical Moments. The question was: WHAT is on the ambo?

First, the ambo is the name of the podium from which I am reading. It is also called a "lectern"; it is generally reserved for reading from the scriptures, and some prayers during the liturgy, although you can see that we also occasionally use it for liturgical formation, as we are doing now.

On the front of our Ambo (or Lectern) is a round, rose-colored, simplified version of a Benedictine Medal. The letters on it are: C S P B, which stands for: *Crux Sancti Patris Benedicti*, which means Cross of the Holy Father Benedict.

The Benedictine medal reminds us that our parish was initially founded by a small group of German immigrant families who held mass in a house on Hilton Ave. and who asked the Benedictine monks of Newark Abbey to say mass for them and eventually to serve their community. Benedictine monks served the parish until the late 1990's, when the parish instead became served by Archdiocesan priests – the first of whom was Fr. Tom Wisniewski, whom many of you will remember. The Benedictine medallion on the ambo is just one of several elements of our church that underscore our Benedictine heritage.

Another place we see that heritage is in the Great Window, over the front doors of the church – which you are all going to have to turn around to see. There, you will see six figures depicted in the stained glass. In the center we have Mary Queen of Heaven, and Christ the King, and on either side of those figures we see saints from the Benedictine tradition – in order from left to right, Pope St. Gregory the Great, St. Scholastica (who was St. Benedict's twin sister), then to the right of Mary and Jesus, we have St. Benedict himself, known as St. Benedict of Nursia, and St. Frances of Rome, a lay woman who became the patroness of the Benedictine oblates.

Finally, there is one more way that the Benedictine spirit lives on in our parish. Benedictines are known for their hospitality and Benedict's Rule includes the reminder that: "Guests are to be welcomed as Christ" (RB 53.1). We are a friendly parish! When we greet each other, welcome visitors, say hello to new faces among us – we are reflecting the Benedictine charism of welcoming guests as we would welcome Christ.

Week 4: November 5, 2023

Good morning/evening! I am (say your name) and I serve (as a lector/ on the Liturgy Committee/ on the Vision Committee – pick one to identify yourself!) This week our Liturgical Moment will focus on some of the depictions of saints in our church – which is appropriate since just last Wednesday was the Feast of All Saints.

Last week we spoke about the signs in our church that are remnants of our Benedictine heritage as a parish, including the medallion on this ambo, and the Benedictine saints in the stained glass in the great window over the main entrance. This week we'll look more closely at the saints in our Holy Family Side Chapel.

The Catholic church in the United States has often been called the church that immigrants built, and to this day, especially in more urban settings, you can often guess which immigrant community built any church by looking at the saints depicted in that church. If you see St. Patrick, St. Bridgit and St. Dymphna, you're probably in a church built by Irish immigrants. St. Anthony of Padua, St. Francis of Assisi, Mother Cabrini? – probably an Italian parish. Pope St. John Paul the Second, St. Hedwig, and St. Casimir, you're in a Polish community.

The saints depicted in the icons in our Holy Family chapel do not however point to one specific immigrant community in this parish, but rather to our rich diversity. So, we have from left to right: St. Josephine Bakhita, an African woman born in the Sudan who survived human trafficking, ultimately becoming a Canossian sister in Italy. Second from the left is St. Martin de Porres – who was the son of a Spanish noble man and free woman of both African and indigenous heritage; he was a lay member of the Dominican

order, a well-known healer and is the patron saint of mixed-race people. Above him is St. Patrick who is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland. Next you will see St. Philip Neri – an Italian saint and a favorite of Fr. Jim’s, who was known for his joyful heart and good humor. Above St. Joseph you will find an icon of St. Cecilia, patron saint of musicians. On the right-hand side, you will see our three final saints, beginning at top with St. Kateri Tekawitha, the first Native American saint, she was a Mohawk convert to Catholicism. Beneath that icon is the icon of The Virgen of Guadalupe, whose appearance to the peasant, Juan Diego (now St. Juan Diego) helped the church take root throughout all of Latin America; she is known as the Patroness of the Americas. And finally, our last icon is that of St. Lorenzo Ruiz, the patron saint of the Philippines. St. Lorenzo was a married father of three when he was put to death for his faith, earning him the title of the protomartyr, or first martyr, from the Philippines.

Reflecting our beautifully diverse parish, these saints from Africa, Europe, the Americas, and Asia surround the beautiful statue of the Blessed Mother standing beside St. Joseph, our patron, who is holding the baby Jesus. The icons call to mind the way the scriptures speak of the “great cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1) who have gone before us in faith, and whose stories continue to inspire us today.



Week 5: November 12, 2023

Good morning/evening! I am (say your name) and I serve (as a lector/ on the Liturgy Committee/ on the Vision Committee – pick one to identify yourself!) Today's Liturgical Moment will focus on the most prominent item in our sanctuary – the Great Crucifix.

A Crucifix is a cross depicted with the body of Jesus (called the Corpus) on the cross. Our crucifix is a portrayal of a very specific passage from scripture, from the Gospel of St. John.

“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.”

So, the two figures at the base of the cross are Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the disciple whom Jesus loved, who is the author of this fourth gospel, St. John. This crucifix strives to be historically accurate since it depicts an actual scene in the gospels, and in the way Jesus's wrists – and not his hands – are pierced by nails and held to the cross – which was the Roman method of crucifixion.

At the top of the cross, above Jesus's head, you see the letters, I-N-R-I. The letters stand for the Latin, “*Jesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum*,” which means, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. In the gospels, Jesus is called King of the Jews only by Gentiles. His Jewish friends and followers called him, Messiah, which becomes translated in the Greek to the word, Christ. In all four gospels Jesus is charged with being the “King of the Jews” which leads to the Romans putting him to death on the cross. That is why you will see the letters I-N-R-I above Jesus's head on most crucifixes.

Our Great Crucifix was restored a little over a dozen years ago, when Bishop Michael Saporito was our pastor. Some of you might remember what a surprise it was to enter the church and realize that the crucifix was missing! The restoration removed 40 years

of dust and brightened the colors of the garments the Blessed Mother and the Beloved Disciple wear, so that it still looks beautiful to this day.

Week 6: November 19, 2023

Good morning/evening! I am (say your name) and I serve (as a lector/ on the Liturgy Committee/ on the Vision Committee – pick one to identify yourself!) This week we will share our sixth and final Liturgical Moment of the fall season. During this season of our Liturgical Moments, the focus has been on what we see when we look around our beautiful church. This final reflection will look at perhaps the most important thing we see during mass – which is each other.

We gather each week as a community to celebrate the mass together, and in that celebration we move as one body through the liturgy. This week we will answer a related question that we received on our feedback forms last spring, which was: why do we sit, stand, and kneel together at different times during the mass?

Many religious traditions value the role and posture of the body in their prayers. Orthodox Jews will gently rock back and forth while praying, Muslims orient their bodies towards Mecca when they kneel to pray five times a day.

At Mass, we Catholics move our bodies into different positions during mass for two key reasons. First, we adopt a specific posture to underscore the MEANING of what is happening. So, we sit during the readings from scripture to better listen and take in the Word of God, to better demonstrate attention. We stand when the Gospel is read to distinguish that reading about the Life of Jesus from the readings that preceded it.

Standing, as we do to greet the procession with our gathering song, is a manifestation of respect. We kneel during the Eucharistic prayer and the communion rite, while the Blessed Sacrament is visible on the altar, to demonstrate our deep reverence for the Eucharist where the bread and wine are transformed into the actual Body and Blood of Christ. How we move our bodies reveals what we believe.

And the second reason we all stand or sit or kneel during the mass is to demonstrate that we are all in this together – we stand or sit or kneel ALL TOGETHER at the same

time in the same place. As we are all made new in baptism, we gather together as the people of God to remember the great gift of God to us, Christ Jesus, whom we see right above our altar table. United through our baptism, we strengthen our bodies and our bonds to each other and to God each week through celebration and reception of the Eucharist. Note that our baptismal font is clad with the same white marble that our altar table is made from. Through our baptism we are made anew, we are made one in Christ, and we are privileged to fortify this identity each week through our Eucharistic celebrations – which we do together. Remember that one meaning of the word LITURGY is “the work of the people.”

Now, since it is our final week, we are again asking for your questions – what other topics about the mass would you like to see addressed? There are forms in the back of church you can fill out, or you can send feedback to the Chair of the Liturgy Committee whose email is listed in the bulletin. Thank you for your attention!