

## **Harvest Festival, Archbishop Flynn, my Grandmother and Human Connections**

I know, there's a lot in that headline, but bear with me. It'll all make sense by the end of the column.

This week is/was our big harvest festival, and it's so great to see such a great turnout each year for this big event. Hopefully if you're reading this Saturday you're planning on a great chicken dinner and some fellowship with parishioners, and if you're reading it Sunday hopefully you had a great time on Friday or Saturday night with the music, the games, the conversations and everything that else that went into the festival. What a great event it's been, and thanks to Bridget Samson who has helped guide the festival and put in so many hours along with the many volunteers who made it happen. Joining her for the planning and execution were Bob Sturm, Brendon Miller, Bridget Sturm, Carmen Johnson, Katie Johnson, Katie Sturm, Karen Hartman, Maureen Sturm, Pam Keuler, Pierre Menard, Rachel Miller, Doris McCarty and Wayne Rychwalski and many others; the list of those who donated baskets, time and talent and so much else really is endless. Thank you all for making it such a great event!

Last week was also the funeral Mass of Archbishop Harry Flynn, who died just over a week ago after battling bone cancer. Unfortunately as I had a funeral Mass at the parish that day, I wasn't able to attend his funeral. But the funeral I was at that day, for Mr. Steve Strese, and the funeral I was at on Wednesday, that of my grandmother, Evelyn who entered eternal life last week too at the age of 102 due to natural causes, and indeed the Harvest Festival, all reminded me of how our relationships with one another mean so much.

I first met Archbishop Flynn when I was 17 and was being confirmed at the Cathedral. He greeted me in the Shrine of the Nations, the statues that are behind the altar, and with a smile asked if I had considered being a priest. (I had a little by that point, but was also discovering dating, and thinking about other vocations but the Holy Spirit worked all of that out). As I got to know him as a seminary student and then as a priest, what always struck me with him was how he knew so much about people. He'd remember names, and details about people's lives. He cared so much about individuals and wanted to build bridges between people and truly get to know his sheep. When you talked to him, you always had his full attention; there was nothing fake about the man.

Growing up, I'd get to spend time with all of my grandparents as we were all located within a few miles of one another in North Minneapolis. With my grandma Evelyn as a child, there were the family meals; the trips to the park; bus rides to the mall (Brookdale); and just the interactions with her and grandpa as a child. As I grew older, she'd call me at seminary to say she was praying for me, and continued to be as active as she could in my life. This was the case for so many in my family as my bonds to my parents and grandparents each have so many great memories and new ones that are made.

I didn't get the honor of getting to know Mr. Steve Strese, but as I offered Mass and he was surrounded by nearly 200 people, I was reminded again as I am at each funeral of the deep impact people have on each other. Steve served our community as a police reserve officer and also as a fire fighter (many officers were present) and lived out his life long vocation as a husband and dad and it was clear he did so much for so many people. What an honor it is to celebrate funeral Masses, because they remind me each time how one life impacts so many people.

And here's what lead me to use the headline I did: all of these events which have impacted me in different ways remind me of the importance of our human connections to one another. There is no substitute for a conversation, looking at someone in the eye when you talk to them, or just being with those you care about. As we hear in the Gospel this week, the apostles ask the Lord to increase their faith. Jesus then talks about going above and beyond what we are commanded to do and to go the extra mile for people. So many people in my life have done that for me, and we must never forget that all of our actions for one another done out of love, which I've seen in the lives of so many people in parishes I've served at, my family and friends. People do so much to build our faith and to help us move forward in life and grow closer to God. And this past week in three different ways reminded of of that.

So never take for granted the people God has put into your life. If you need to reconnect, don't make excuses. If you need to forgive, ask for God's help and extend an olive branch. Say prayers for people both those you are close to and those who may be more challenging. Make time to get together. Visit a cemetery and pray for those who've entered eternal life. And never forget our connections to one another mean so much - so let us do all we can to bring one another closer to God through the gift of our time and presence.

God bless,

Fr. Paul