

Community is Something to Celebrate

As a lifelong Minnesotan, one of the things that I do every year without thinking about it is to go to the State Fair. It was a part of my childhood, and I continued it through adulthood, sometimes even going alone. There's the sights and the food, there's the 4H projects and literature you put in a bag only to find it sometime in winter and wonder why did I need a book on rail safety and literature from MENSA when I'll never get into the club, because I always leave three golf tees in that triangle IQ tester thing. And there's the people watching too.

However, with typically over 100,000 in the space of a small town spread out, one can easily blend in the masses at the Fairgrounds. As such, its nickname of the "Great Minnesota Get Together" is appropriate, but it's typically not an event where you are walking up to strangers and say "hey how are you doing want to go get some cheese curds?" Nonetheless it's a great celebration.

This year I went having not gone since 2019; in 2020 it obviously didn't happen, and last year I could have went but was worried it would be kind of dystopian; I didn't want "mostly" a Fair but the real thing. A good friend who did go said it was pretty normal, but there were still Covid precautions such as very few media broadcasts in 2021 at the Fair. This year however was as normal as it gets, and I noticed nothing different from what I've enjoyed over the years. I had my beloved foot long hot dog (ketchup, mustards, fried onions) and chocolate malt at the Dairy Building (all other malts are pretenders) and took in two new hip bands the kids are into, REO Speedwagon and Styx (it's good to know what they listen to these days). A nice way to spend a summer's day, though bittersweet too as when I leave the Fair I always kind of sense summer is about to end. Kind of like a Vikings Season after week 2.

However, it was great to be back to "normal" in the sense things went well, and I look forward to next year's Fair. Only 11 months to go now.

We don't have the State Fair next weekend, but we do have the great Saint Joe's get together, our Harvest Festival. Jordan Ecker, our director of Engagement and Communications, has been working very hard for months with a group of volunteers planning and getting things ready.

Friday and Saturday we'll have bingo, a wine pull, a punch wall, silent auction and kids games and a caramel apple bar. Pork chops are on tap for dinner on Friday along with Live Music from Radio Joe and the Jazzbos. Saturday we'll have a chicken dinner after Mass and a DJ Dance. For the dinner, you can reserve online at www.sjfestival.org, and also you can get them at Mass too in the gathering space. Don't forget the raffle too, as we'll have the big drawing on Sunday morning. (Though due to the Vikings playing the Saints in London at 8:30 local time, our weekend Masses on October 2 will be 7 AM, 8:30 PM and 10:30 PM vs. AM to adjust for the priest wanting to see the game. I think I can get away with that can't I?).

It's been a real labor of love from Jordan and a number of volunteers who've been working so hard. But the best thing about the Harvest Festival is the people. Things are pretty back to normal now, but the past couple of years have been hard on us all. People aren't meant to be holed up in homes watching Netflix all day and do things "virtually" all the time. Community is so important, and it was great to have a festival last year with good turnout, and I really think this year's will be even stronger. People get the chance to sit down and talk, to connect more deeply, have some fun at Bingo and have their kids meet their neighbor's kids, and have a relaxing, great time. Unlike the State Fair where it's hard to talk to folks you don't know, at our festival people really get the chance to get to know one another even better; it's something you see after our Masses too. Saint Joe's isn't a "Mass factory" parish where people shuffle in and out quickly; it's, as one parishioner put it, a "small town" kind of feeling, and I've felt so welcomed here now as I come up on 8 years next year.

I hope to see you at the festival next Friday and/or Saturday night. A heartfelt thanks to Jordan and our staff and our many volunteers for their incredibly hard work in preparing it.

Have a great week!

Fr. Paul