



[RETURN TO CAMPAIGN HOMEPAGE](#)

## Homilies

(The following homily was given by Father Brian at all of the Masses on the weekend of May 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015.)

### A. What We Value

- back in late January and early February, when we were just launching our Parish Growth Campaign, one of the questions we were all asked to mull over is what we value about being members of St. Lawrence the Martyr . . . what do we love about the parish, and having a share in the Christian life that's centered here
- since then, almost every bulletin has listed responses we've received—some from folks like yourselves who are here, worshiping often, participating in the life of the church as energetically as you can, others from people who have lost touch with their faith, but still see something here they want to hang on to
- I've read through every one of those responses—they're still coming in—but I don't think I've ever come across someone saying that they just *love* being asked for money . . . nor would I ever say that I love having to talk about it, and I've tried to make those occasions few and far between
- but why is that? we constantly have to deal with the financial realities of our lives at home, in the workplace, over at Stop n' Shop, just a month ago with our income tax preparers . . . and most people aren't shy in any of those situations
- but when it comes to *this* place, we Catholics have an inbred feeling that church and dollars don't belong together—shouldn't even be mentioned in the same sentence; our Protestant and



Jewish brothers and sisters would find that rather strange—for them, talking about the financial concerns of church or temple is just as necessary as dealing with college tuitions and heating bills

## B. A Confession to Make

- but entirely comfortable or not, here we are . . . we've come that that phase in our Parish Campaign where the focus turns to what's materializing in the collection basket each week; but not simply because we need to be able to turn on the air conditioning in another couple of weeks—it touches on something much deeper than that
- let me illustrate by making a confession—something I don't think I've shared in almost 25 years of priesthood . . . prior to just a few years ago, for all the time I was assigned to my previous parishes – I never contributed to the weekly collection
- *I do now . . .* but back in Seaford, and Bellmore, and Garden City, it never occurred to me that I should be sharing what's in my wallet with the parish; I think I reasoned that I was already giving so much of myself—I was trying at least—giving my time, my energy, my talents, my heart
- but do priests use a weekly envelope? it never occurred to me to do that; and I'm a little ashamed that for perhaps 22 years I wasn't supporting those parishes the way that so many of you support St. Lawrence
- what changed that for me is a still a little fuzzy, but I think it happened not long after Bishop Murphy asked me to become pastor . . . stepping into that new role, I quickly came to look at this place—to look at all of you—with a new set of eyes; I wanted



to see this community grow and thrive with a desire I'm not sure I had felt so urgently before

- I realized that I am part of something that I love—that I deeply value—and it occurred to me that I wasn't extending myself to you—to us—in at least one very practical and necessary way

## C. Stewardship

- most of you have heard the term “stewardship” before . . . it was more in vogue a number of years ago, but it's a biblically based idea that continues to carry a lot of weight . . . essentially it means that we are not the masters of what we have, even of who we are . . . that everything that makes up our lives, from the food we eat to the home that shelters us to the work we do to the family we cherish to the clothes on our back is ultimately NOT our own handiwork—as much as we like to give ourselves the credit
- everything—right down to the tiniest crumb of life—comes from God . . . everything is a completely undeserved and unmerited **gift** from the One who delights in lavishing good things on his children
- *we are not our own*, as St. Paul would say; we belong to Another, and everything we mistakenly presume is ours is in fact his gift to us; we are stewards of those blessings—not owners, but caretakers
- so the logic goes that if I am not the Master of my own universe; if all I am and all I have is a treasure poured into my lap by the One who doesn't owe me a thing, then my challenge is to *open my hands*, and give away some meaningful part of what's been placed in my care—meaning my time, my heart, my gifts, and yes, even my dollars and cents



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- we do that giving all the time—sometimes grudgingly, as on April 15<sup>th</sup>, sometimes gleefully, as when I pick up a gift card for my nephew’s birthday
- this weekend, Jim Folks and I are NOT asking you to fill up the collection basket ( -----!), but more importantly, to resolve to doing some thinking and praying over the next few weeks
- ask yourself that question we began with back in the cold of winter: what do I value here at St. Lawrence? what do I love about being a member of this particular faith family?
- and if you do, in fact, value this community, would you consider supporting it—supporting US—even a smidge more than you have in the past?
- many of you have been articulating such wonderful dreams for what our church can be, for the things we can accomplish right now, and for the next generation of St. Lawrence parishioners; will you play a part in having those hopes and dreams actually take shape?
- maybe now’s just not the right time for you to be asked about increased giving . . . and that’s OK. but if you’ve been blessed by God in such a way that you **can** lend a little more support to building up our corner of God’s kingdom—this tiny portion of the vineyard here in Sayville—please do
- I waited much too long to realize that I had something more I could contribute, and I don’t know that I would have decided to give if I didn’t feel a part of something living, something growing, something beautiful; I hope you feel a valued part of this faith family, and no matter what you can or cannot give, will always be at home right here
- God bless you



(The following homily was given by Father Brian at all of the Masses on the weekend of March 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015.)

#### A. Sister Sylvia

- one of the more vivid memories I have of being in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade at St. Pius X School in Plainview is a sun-drenched windowsill in Sister Sylvia's classroom, crowded with clear plastic cups and the bottom halves of milk containers, and all of us kids waiting each spring day for something wonderful to happen
- at that age we certainly wouldn't have been familiar with Jesus' Gospel metaphor of the grain of wheat, but we were being schooled in exactly what he was getting at as we hovered so expectantly over those milk cartons filled with dirt
- in each one we had deposited a few dry, lifeless seeds—marigold, or maybe cucumber—we buried, we watered (usually overwatered), and we waited
- milk carton planters were OK, but the clear plastic cups were much better, because sometimes you could actually see the little miracle that was happen-ing inside: the seed's outer shell, wet and warmed on the windowsill, finally splitting and cracking to allow a tiny pale seedling to emerge, seemingly out of nowhere
- there was something magical about it, and very mysterious—especially for a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader
- but sure enough, from one tiny seed you might get a whole vine of cucumbers, or a vase-full of marigolds



## B. Dying

- Jesus certainly knew how to choose his imagery
- he, of course, is THE grain of wheat, the seed of life whose being crushed, and quite literally buried in the earth, has yielded the most incredible of harvests
- we, too, are “seeds,” each of us encasing a potential harvest—not in cucumbers or marigolds or even wheat—but a yield so much more valuable
- but as Jesus states so unflinchingly, *there has to be a dying first*; life doesn’t emerge, fragile and beautiful, from nowhere, but from the death of what came before
- this [morning], with only a week left before we enter into the holiest days of the Christian calendar, I’d like to challenge you—to challenge *myself*—to do some dying

## C. Ministry

- for weeks now, we’ve been talking about the indispensable place of ministry in the church . . . and ministry—whatever form it takes—is *a kind of dying* . . . it’s a deliberate choice to set something of ourselves aside, even for a brief while, and to allow *another person* to become the focus of our attention, the center of our world
- right next door in the Bethany Center, is a whole array of tables—and on those tables are beautiful display boards and photographs



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and literature, all of it describing and celebrating the surprising array of ministries that are happening right here at St. Lawrence—everything from working with the needy to singing in one of the choirs, from participating in the youth group to teaching the faith to our kids, from worshiping before the Blessed Sacrament to coaching a CYO basketball team

- the whole of this weekend, the Bethany Center is stuffed with reminders of so much of what's good about our parish—so much that's generous, and spirited, and prayerful, and fun
- but one could also say it's a room full of ways to die—to give a piece of your time, your talent, your heart away for the sake of your sisters and brothers
- the ministries represented right next door are the life's blood of the parish, and without that kind of giving, without those hours and that dedication and that generosity of spirit, the church would be little more than a building
- last [Sunday], most of you left Mass with a packet of information on what's already happening here at St. Lawrence, and what we hope to see take wing in the months ahead; this ministry phase of our Parish Campaign can literally transform our faith community into a place of even richer faith, even stronger hope, even deeper love than ever before . . . but it takes a willingness to die, just a bit, to die to that part of ourselves that would say, "C'mon, I'm just too busy right now . . . I'm sure there are other people who can take care of it . . . I don't have any special gifts . . ."



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- ignore that voice . . . take a few minutes after Mass today to slip into the Bethany Center, treat yourself to a hot cup of coffee, and do some wandering among the displays; see if perhaps there's something that catches your eye and your imagination, something you've never tried before or given any real thought to being part of, something that might be *just the thing* to soften the magical seed that is your heart, to split it wide open, and allow something beautiful and new to be born in you
- today isn't a day for signing your life away . . . it's a day for taking a peek, for doing some thinking, for heading home with a few leaflets and an idea or two
- during this last full week of Lent, I invite you to mull things over, and if you're ready, check a box on the beige Commitment form you received last week; check the ministries you want to continue doing, and check the ones you'd like to hear more about; remember, you can do all this on the parish website, too
- and on Palm Sunday—one week from [today], if you're ready, bring that Commitment form to Mass; Fr. Kevin and I will be inviting those who have one to place it at the foot of the cross during the liturgy
- now, can washing altar linens, or joining the Knights of Columbus, or coaching a 5<sup>th</sup> grade CYO team, or decorating the gym for a St. Patrick's Day dance honestly make you a new person, a more Christ-like person?
- I admit, it may sound like a stretch, but I also remember the mini-miracles I saw on Sr. Sylvia's windowsill, way back in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade,



and if it can work for marigold seeds, it can certainly work for my heart, and yours

(The following homily was given by Father Brian at all of the Masses on the weekend of February 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015.)

#### A. Introduction

- at each of the Masses last weekend, Pat Beach stood here at the pulpit to share a beautiful reflection with you about what she values in our parish—what she most loves about St. Lawrence
- her talk was one of the very first pieces in a venture we’re embarking on over the coming few months—a parish-wide campaign that’s meant to bring even greater vitality, participation, attendance, and financial support to our community
- but this process of growing together as a faith family begins with some looking inward . . . what is it that keeps us here? why do you choose to call St. Lawrence home? what do you value, enjoy, love about this place?
- this weekend, with many of you thinking more about the Seahawks and the Patriots than about parish membership, it’s *the pastor’s turn* . . . what do I, Brian, love about this community?

#### B. Home

- I could start with the seemingly little things . . . like the smell of evergreen in the church at Christmastime, or my cozy rooms upstairs in the rectory, where I can touch the ceiling without even



having to stretch, or the maple tree in back of the house that turns into a golden torch each autumn

- but that kind of list would have you here till kickoff time, and I know you don't want that!
- maybe I'll start with a memory that came to me only two days ago . . . I was recalling my first visit to this church, in the spring of 2009. I knew I'd be due to leave St. Joseph's in Garden City, and I was casing a number of parishes I thought might be interesting prospects for a brand new assignment
- I had just spent a good hour at St. Pat's in Bayshore, and realized that Sayville would only be a few more minutes east, so I drove here in the rain (I still remember it was raining!) without any appointment to see Fr. Nick, and kind of tiptoed into this building—just as Marie Winn (whom I didn't know was Marie Winn) was working with the choir . . . funny that I remember all this so clearly
- anyway, I walked into the church—right through those doors—at an off hour, without any interview set up . . . and I immediately felt at ease; I felt *at home*
- I only stayed a few minutes to say a prayer, but the impression was unmistakable—so much so that I called Fr. Nick that night, and said I'd like to be considered as a candidate for associate pastor
- that sense of “at-home-ness” has never left me, even when I've been confronted with anxious moments, and challenging moments, and lonely moments, and wearisome moments; I love my own family, and I'm so fortunate that my parents still live only 40 minutes away, but St. Lawrence is my home—you are my home—and *I love that*



### C. More to Love

- and what have I found in this newest home of mine? what do I love about my faith family?
- I love walking into the gym in the days before Thanksgiving or Christmas, and seeing row upon row of tables sagging under the weight of all the food and gifts you've donated for those who struggle in our neighborhood;
- I love seeing the smile on a second grader's face—as Fr. Kevin and I did just yesterday afternoon—as they finish their very first confession (without fainting!), and suddenly realize it wasn't all that bad;
- I love celebrating this sacrifice of love, here at our altar—whether with 6 people on a snowy morning (many of whom have walked here), or with too many to count packed in like sardines at the first Mass on Christmas Eve;
- I love getting peppered with questions about what I do and where I live and how much I get paid by a class of 5<sup>th</sup> graders, and later finding that one of the adults listening in has given me the gift of a miniature aquarium because I happened to mention having a fish tank of my own when I was a kid . . . such thoughtfulness, such remarkable generosity of spirit;
- I love having the privilege of stepping into the most sacred and secret parts of your lives—even though I'm a relative stranger—to absolve you of your sins, or to baptize your children, or to bury your loved ones who've gone home to God;
- even though I think of myself as basically a shy person, I love sharing something of myself, and of my faith—in a talk like this, or in the column I enjoy writing for the bulletin;



- I love my staff—as a still-new pastor, I couldn't have hoped to work and pray and plan and argue and share discipleship with a more extraordinary group of people—so Christ-like, so faith-filled, so *beyond*-committed, so forgetful of themselves;
- and I love getting to know you—your hopes, your joys, your stresses, your worries, your victories, your faith, your constancy, your passions, your struggles . . . your stories . . . and I wonder, who am I that such treasure should be poured into my lap?

#### D. And what do you love?

- I really could go on till kickoff time, but I won't!
- instead, I want to ask you to pose the same question to yourself that I've been asking, that Pat Beach asked just last weekend: what do you love about this place—not so much the building—as much as one can find comfort and serenity and inspiration here—but the community that fills these walls . . . what keeps you coming back? what's the glue that has you stuck to St. Lawrence the Martyr? what do you love about being part of this phenomenon we call “parish” or “church”?
- in just another week and a half, you'll have the chance to share some of that, over a good cup of coffee and in the company of fellow parishioners
- I hope you've already seen the invitation to come to one of three special gatherings in the school gym, one on February 11<sup>th</sup>, and two more on February 12<sup>th</sup> . . . nothing complicated, nothing overly lengthy, just a chance to listen, and pray together, and think about who we are now, and who we dream of becoming in the future



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- **please come** . . . we really can't stretch ourselves toward the future that waits for us out there, until we take some time to look *in here*, and recognize how richly blessed we already are
- the coming months of this exciting parish-wide campaign really can lay the foundation for wonderful, amazing, unexpected things in our future; but first, where are we right now? **what do you love?**
- thanks so much . . . enjoy the game (if you'll be watching) . . . and try to keep warm!