Opening Doors, Opening Hearts

All across the country children and families are preparing for an evening of Trick-or-Treating. It's a wondrous thing for a child to ring all the doorbells in their neighborhood (and beyond), and doors just open up. And they get candy and treats… lots of it! The only work is to dress up like a chosen superhero, occupation, princess, movie character, or celebrity singer or athlete. (Hopefully they don't dress in costumes that glamorize violence and evil… there's already too much of that in the world as it is!). Adults often join in, too, finding it fun to dress up.

From a spiritual perspective, the most significant "dress up day" a person ever has is the day of their Baptism. Babies and children are dressed in white, whether it's a beautiful new dress, little white suit, or a vintage family gown that's been used for generations. But that's not the "clothing" I am referring to. In the Sacrament of Baptism, a person is clothed in Christ. The beautiful white garment is an outward symbol of what happens interiorly. The child's soul, washed of original sin, is also clothed in the dignity and salvific grace of Jesus Christ – and "putting on" that gift is more beautiful and glorious than our minds can comprehend. It opens up the doors of Heaven so that the child, also anointed with the Holy Spirit, has access to all the gifts and treasures of Heaven. A million times better than any lollipop or Almond Joy.

As adult disciples, we strive to see, know, and love the Joy of Heaven that has been opened up for us. What begins in Baptism unfolds through our continued participation in the sacramental life of the Church, especially in the Eucharist. And that enables us to open the door of our hearts to Christ. In the Scriptures, the Lord famously tells us, *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock" (Rev 3:20)*. And with hearts open to the Lord with faith and prayer, we easily recognize and affirm the greatest Commandment, which was enjoined on us by Christ in the Gospel reading this Sunday: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

This commandment actually comes from the Mosaic law code presented in the Book of Deuteronomy (6:5), and has always been central to the spiritual life of the Israelites and Jews, even until today. Jewish homes often have this verse rolled up on a small scroll and affixed to the doorpost at the entrance of their home (in accord with Dt 6:9), that they may always know the Lord in their heart and be reminded of how they are to live.

As followers of Christ, we obviously receive the same law, which is to be written in our hearts. When it is, our lives demonstrate gratitude to God and a commitment to the gifts that Christ has given us in the Church, the fruits of which are seen in our response of stewardship, which is responsibly caring for the people, assets and resources entrusted to us as a parish.



Last weekend I spoke at all the Masses about some of the financial needs of the parish, and myself and the parish staff are greatly encouraged and super grateful to those who responded positively. For those who missed it, look for the text of my talk in a link in the electronic newsletter sent to parishioners. For those who are new to the parish and not yet registered, you can visit www.stalphonsuschicago.org and click on the "belong" tab.

As we all reflect on supporting the parish, we know that the principle of stewardship is that we all have a part. Our world unfortunately has conditioned us to assume that someone else somewhere will take care of things – *i.e., 'not my job!'* – It's a worldly thinking that stands opposed to the Christian spirit and commandment of love, in which the principle of stewardship dwells.

So many of us feel so blessed in so many ways here at St. Alphonsus – the beauty of the church (inside and out), the music, reverent liturgies, dedicated volunteers, grace-filled confessions, a vibrant young adult community, a welcome atmosphere for families, caring priests and staff, and occasionally a good dad joke (or a bad one!) in the homily – all these things are blessings that flow freely to you in your spiritual home. But all of them do come at a cost. And that cost is intended to be shared by all in the community.

If you appreciate these blessings, consider this an invitation to express gratitude to the Lord for providing these blessings as a gift, one that was given to you through the time and talent of many people, present and past. Then the gift of your support may become a multitude of blessings for the present and the future.

For your convenience, use the QR Code to connect to GiveCentral, the Archdiocese's preferred online giving platform. You can adjust your giving amount and frequency there, or if you've not used it before, you can create a new account and set up regular donations that way.

And again, on behalf of the parish staff, parishioners, and all those who are spiritually and sacramentally served by our ministries, I express my most sincere thanks. And please be assured of my constant prayers for your spiritual growth and well being.

Rev. Steven Bauer, Pastor