

Youth Day Sermon, Domenic Fenoglio  
April 24, 2022

One of my very first memories of Ladue Chapel was going to Eckert's to pick pumpkins when I was in fifth grade. I didn't know very many people because we had just joined the church a few years ago, I had just moved houses, and I was starting at a new school that fall. I remember going on the haunted hayride, picking pumpkins, and ending the night sitting around a campfire roasting hotdogs and marshmallows. If you know anything about me, that food was enough to get me hooked.

I kept coming back to route 345 and youth groups and activities throughout middle school and high school. I remember playing soccer in fellowship hall and breaking a light. I remember playing foosball upstairs in the youth room. I remember listening to Mel explain countless bible stories. As I grew up, Ladue Chapel was a place where I felt comfortable and safe. I always looked forward to coming to activities here so I could see my friends and Mel. It was like catching my breath after a long week and having the chance to center myself.

Before long, confirmation came around, and it was time for me to fully become a member of the church. This forced me to reflect not just on what Church had done to shape my character, but also how it shaped my faith. We talked about everything from the reformations to the sacraments, and at the end of our journey we were asked to write a "What I believe" statement regarding our thoughts on God and the church. While I will admit that my writing in that statement was reminiscent of a middle schooler, I still resonate with most of what I wrote today. The most impactful line, to me, was this: "I believe that God was the one who gave humans traits like empathy and charity. It is not by chance that humans tend to look out for one another. God wants us to help each other in times of need and support each other in times of struggle."

What really brought out these ideas to me was getting involved in Urban Plunge and the Matthew 25 fellowship. I first went on Urban Plunge entering my freshman year of high school, and we did work in St. Louis city. While it was not the first time I had volunteered, it was the first time that I had debriefed what my work meant. Every night we would discuss why we were doing what we were doing, and what it meant to these communities. An emphasis was placed on how our religion asked us to live in God's image, and what that meant. Jesus is drawn to those who are marginalized by society, those cast away or told they are not worth anything, because he knows that everyone

deserves God's love. He knows that people like you and me are loved by many, our family, our community, and our friends, but people who feel alone are never really alone because they have God.

This is what I like to bring up whenever my friends ask me why I am so religious. I tell them that we have the privilege of choosing whether or not to believe in God because we have so many people who believe in us. A lot of people are told they aren't worth anything their entire lives, so when they walk into a church and are told they are loved, it means more to them than we can imagine. The love of God is something that everyone deserves, and I think it's our job to help other people realize this love.

So, when the opportunity to participate in the Matthew 25 fellowship came along, I signed up right away. The focus of this fellowship was to learn more about the systemic inequities that led to things like hunger and homelessness. Because it took place during the height of the pandemic, most of our lessons came through Zoom, where we met with different charities and speakers. At the end of every week, one of our assignments was to write a page on what we had learned. This reflection allowed me to further grow an understanding of what I believed and what I could do to help others. The Matthew 25 fellowship was a culmination of years of learning I had done in church, and after I finished, I finally felt like I knew what God and the church meant to me.

Ladue Chapel has taught me what it means to be a good Christian. For me, it means using my talents and gifts to help others feel loved. It means lending a hand to a brother or sister who has fallen. It means taking the time to thank those who have helped me. It means reaching out to peers who are sitting alone at lunch. It means helping each other in times of need and lending support to each other in times of struggle.

I'd like to end with a reading from the Book of Matthew, Chapter 25, verses 34-40:

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; **35** for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, **36** I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' **37** Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? **38** And when was it that we saw you a stranger and

welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? **39** And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' **40** And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family,<sup>14</sup> you did it to me.