

Happy Celebration of Ministries Sunday. I know that there are some new faces among us and I know that there are some of you who have been doing this with us for many years. Today is the day in our parish when we fluff up our feathers and rejoice in the good we have done and will do, always with God's help. Today is the day when we allow ourselves a little extra pride in the accomplishments of our amazing community, the children we've clothed, the men we've helped through recovery, the books we've read together, the worship services we've pulled off, the committees that have met, the faces we have welcomed.

We're not ones to wallow in too much self-pride, we know there is work to do and we're pretty good at getting things accomplished. But today we just relax and have a little pride in accomplishment before tomorrow we get back to the Lord's work.

Today is the day in our parish when we celebrate the good, hard, fun and holy work we do here. We lift these banners high into the air both to show them off to one another, and also to offer them and the ministries they represent to God, the one who inspires all good things.

I love these banners. They get ratty and dog-eared every year and every year, some get refurbished, redesigned and made anew. Some stay lovingly ratty. They are none of them perfect, though some are closer than others.

I love the ministries they represent, equally ratty and dog eared, some of them renewed and refreshed, some of them still churning along as they have for decades. They are none of them perfect ministries, though some are closer than others.

Mostly, I love the people that make up these ministries. You are ratty and dog-eared and beautiful and recharged and refreshing. You are none of you perfect, though some try a little harder than others. I love being in community with you. And I can tell from the smiles on your faces during that banner parade that you love being in community with each other.

In our gospel today, we hear Jesus proclaim that he is to build his church upon Peter. Peter, I hope you remember, is the disciple that is often most like us. We hear stories about Peter, the Everyman, trying his best and messing up. "Shall I build tents for you and Moses and Elijah?" asks Peter on the mountaintop. "Not only my hands but wash my whole body!" urges Peter at the footwashing. "I will never deny you!" Peter bravely declares just before Jesus walks to Golgotha.

This is Peter. Peter whom I have preached about before, bless-his-heart Peter who tries really hard and never quite catches on. Peter who must have caused Jesus to roll his holy eyes at least three times a day for the length of their relationship. This is the bedrock and foundation of our church.

Jesus wasn't gambling when he chose Peter to build the church upon. Jesus wasn't hoping or betting against the odds. Jesus saw Peter, ratty and dog-eared and messy and not-quite perfect and knew exactly what he was doing. He was building a community of human beings, in all of our confusion and complication.

Peter was the perfect founder for our messy church because he stepped up and answered those questions, he put himself forth and tried to be good. And sometimes he failed. But he kept answering, he kept stepping up, he kept loving and hoping and he kept believing. And sometimes he said, "You are the Messiah, The Son of the living God." And those times, *he got it right*.

We believe in an Almighty God to whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden. And, on one level, this is a terrifying thought. The things we try to hide from each other, those things we try to hide even from ourselves, God knows them. God knows our innermost intimate selves, our dirty secrets and our shameful truths. Jesus knows when we have let ourselves down and when we have fallen short, when we have hurt others, when we have turned away from God to something more profitable and less morally clear.

Earlier this week, I was privileged to hear Don Saliers, professor emeritus of liturgy and music at Candler preach a homily. His subject, among other things, was the collect for purity and what he said had a profound effect on the way I hear that prayer.

You know the collect for purity. We just said it a few minutes ago. If you've been coming to church for a few months, a few years or a few decades, you've heard it many times and probably have it memorized like I do. Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord, Amen.

For years, I lived uncomfortably with the collect for purity. It is hard to be reminded week in and week out that there's someone *out there* that knows *everything*. And then several years ago, I had the same revelation that Dr. Saliers preached about a few days ago. That is, to be so perfectly known is an incredible gift.

We believe in a God from whom no secrets are hidden. And, incredibly, that selfsame God loves us anyway. Let me repeat that for you: The God that knows everything written on your heart, the good the bad and the truly awful, loves you anyway.

God sees that we are not yet finished, that we keep trying, that we lift our banners year after year as a living sacrifice of love and time and sweat and tears and laughter. God sees that sometimes we try to build a tent when no tent is needed, that sometimes we open our mouths and say really stupid things. God rolls those holy eyes at us at least

three times a day but in the end loves us for exactly who we are, that is, exactly who God made us to be.

It is this God who founded the church on Peter, imperfect but perfectly worthy. And it is this God, brothers and sisters, who looks down on our offering of banners, ratty-tatty and refurbished, and on the offering of our ministries, tired and refreshed, and on our offering of community and even of our very lives, sacred and profane, and says, “This, this is good.”