

This Sunday we begin the **Scrutinies** – the three pre-baptismal exorcisms for those preparing for Easter Sacraments. **The exorcism prayers remind us that we are in a spiritual battle.** We are no match for our opponent: Satan and all his demonic powers. As early Christian writers used to point out, no matter how much we fast, the devil needs no food. No matter how much we keep vigil, the devil needs no sleep. And he has been around longer than any of us. He knows all the tricks and he laughs at us when we imagine ourselves to be invincible. We would be completely lost except for one thing: We have access to a power infinitely greater than the devil. By our baptism we have received Jesus and his Holy Spirit. A popular hymn has these words: “Our striving would be losing, were not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing. Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he!”

Here in Monroe we saw a wonderful instance of people opening themselves to God’s power to save. On Tuesday some 700 people attended the premiere of **Appalachian Dawn**. I was skeptical whether we could fill even one theater, but so many people came than we filled two - and had to turn people away. The movie depicts the transformation of a town when Christians joined together. At the end of the movie, a minister from that town gave a testimony to what God is doing in their area. I was particularly impressed by what is happening at their local high school. They gave an example that *freedom of religion* does not mean *freedom from religion*. We have a great treasure and we desire to offer it humbly and respectfully to all – especially to our young people. As one our pastors said, the question is: **Are we desperate enough?** Do we recognize that we cannot do it on our power – that we need God?

On the theme of our need for God, **Archbishop Sartain** has put together a series of **Lenten Reflections**. If you listen to Sacred Heart Radio, I am sure you have heard some of them. He gives brief yet powerful meditations on topics such as temptation, grudges, surrender and mercy. You can listen to the Archbishop’s Lenten Reflection online by going to:
<http://www.seattlearchdiocese.org/Archdiocese/Sartain/retreats.aspx>

As I mentioned last week, some fifty-five young people (and about fifteen adults) from our parish participated in a wonderful retreat based on **Pope John Paul II’s Theology of the Body**. Below is a picture of the retreat speakers: Sister Miriam James Heidland, Dario Mobino, Kristine Mauss and Bishop Joseph Tyson. **They spoke about why God made us male and female – and how that basic fact can help unlock God’s plan.** I hope to say something about this theme at our Generations of Faith session this Wednesday evening and on Thursday evening to gather our young people for a follow-up. We will also be bringing together details of upcoming events such as the **Fun Run** next Saturday morning.

Sr. Miriam, Kristine, Bishop Tyson, Dario



Adam, Ryan, Aaron, Alane, Arielle



We had a productive **Parish Council** meeting last week. On behalf of the Building Commission, Steve Schilling presented a plan for renovation of the **parish hall restrooms, kitchen and carpet**. I hope to move ahead on these projects as soon as possible. They of course require financial support. Many of you donate to our **Building Fund** and desire to see improvements in our parish facilities. I also hope to present these projects (and others, such as the playground) in relation to the Annual Catholic Appeal.

At the Council meeting I had the opportunity to present some of my personal vision. I will write more about that in coming bulletin columns. One thing you might want to know is that **this year I am celebrating my 40th anniversary as a priest.** Forty is a significant number. The Israelites, as you know, spent forty years in the desert where they received the Ten Commandments, water from the rock and the manna. Like them – in spite of my own ups and downs – I have received wonderful things, including the assignment as pastor of St. Mary of the Valley. I believe that we have a beautiful future together.

I want to thank all those who are participating in the **Spiritual Adoption** program. Last weekend **53 parishioners made the commitment to say a short prayer every day for nine months for a child in danger** and for the child's parents. Sr. Barbara has made a calligraphy list of those children. We will continue to add names this weekend and after our Generations of Faith session this Wednesday.

