

St. Francis of Assisi Parish Ann Arbor.

August 28, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we celebrate the Feast of St. Augustine of Hippo, Bishop and Doctor of the Church. Noted for his brilliance and his rhetoric, he was probably the most influential philosopher and theologian in the western Church since St. Paul. In this time of great racial and communal tensions, it is good to point out that St. Augustine, a native of North Africa, was most likely a black man.



Of course, we will never know this for certain as our earliest image (seen here) is unclear, but given that he was born in Africa to a woman (the ever persevering and prayerful St. Monica, who was very likely a member of the Berber race) and a Roman colonist, the chances are great that he was of mixed race. Of course, as Christians, we believe that as we are all made in the image and likeness of God, the color of our skin is ultimately accidental and irrelevant before our Creator. It is simply part of the great diversity of creation meant to enhance and not divide God's people. To use a phrase coined by Martin Luther King, God sees and judges us by the "*content of our character.*"

Whatever the color of his skin, Augustine's spiritual journey, recalled in his autobiography "*The Confessions,*" still speaks to every human heart that seeks the truth and finds it in the person of Jesus Christ. So today, we honor this great African man of God for his learning, his humility and his dedication to Christ and his Church.

THE DISPENSATION and WHY is SUNDAY SPECIAL?

As you know Bishop Boyea has extended the dispensation from the Sunday obligation to attend Mass to the end of the liturgical year- Nov 28. In the past few weeks, I have received several emails asking what this actually means. So, let me take a moment to explain.

From the very beginning, the Church has always held that Sunday- the Sabbath or Lord's Day- is different from all other days of the week. All Christians are asked to respect this difference and to use this day for the purposes of worship of God. So, to miss Sunday Mass intentionally has always been considered a grave sin- a denial of the worship that is due to God and for Catholics, a denial of what is necessary to faith- namely to hear the scriptures and to receive the Bread of Life

in Holy Communion. With the current dispensation, and in light of the Covid Virus, this obligation has been *temporarily* suspended until the end of November. One question that has now arisen is whether this means that we are free to treat Sunday as just another day. Clearly, NOT! While the dispensation is in place it should not be used as an excuse to avoid Mass if at the same time you are doing lots of other activities that could so easily expose you to the virus, such as large gatherings, eating out or shopping.

So, let me outline a few things that you can do to nourish your lives of faith and to stay close to Christ and the community of faith, even if you are still worried about attending Mass:

- Here at SFA, we are continuing to live-stream our Saturday 5pm and our Sunday 10:30am Masses so you can join us virtually from home at anytime during the day and pray along with us in a reverent and safe manner.
- You can join us by driving to the parish for our Sunday 10:30am Mass, park and listen online and then receive Holy Communion immediately afterwards in front of the Church.
- If you don't have access to the internet, take 15 minutes with family and pray the rosary or use the scriptures of the day to spend some time in the presence of God.
- Visit the Church in the quiet of the afternoon and pray. Making that effort will keep you in the habit of sanctifying the Lord's Day.
- Attend one of our weekday Masses (M-F at 9:15am) when numbers in attendance are lower. This is especially available to our seniors and to those with medical conditions.

So you see, even with this Virus, there is still much that we can do to keep our spiritual life fresh and vibrant!

DAILY ROSARY at 8:45am

At the request of many parishioners, we have decided to pray a daily rosary for the needs of the world, our families and the Church. After the Mass, the rosary, grounded in scripture and recalling the events in the life of Christ and his Blessed Mother, is the most powerful of all prayers after the mass itself. Beginning this Tuesday, Sept 1, we will pray the rosary every weekday, MTWF at 8:45am and Th during our holy hour following the 9:15am Mass. It will be live streamed and then available all day, or as I said above, you can join us in the Church.

A special invitation is extended to the parents and guardians of our school children for Friday mornings. What a wonderful gift to give your child when you join us to pray for them in this special way. Sign up details will be sent to you through the parish school.

SFA SCHOOL

Speaking of the school community, SFA School reopened this past Monday and so far, our new structures and timetables are going well. Let me once again thank the

principal, faculty and staff for their commitment and hard work in opening our school, and thank you also to the committee that put together our plan to reopen. If you are on the parish campus, don't be surprised to see our students out and about or having outdoor instruction - BUT please- if you are driving- SLOW DOWN!

CONFESSIONS at SFA

We recently restored our regular Saturday Confessions from 3:30pm to 4:30pm. These too are going well. We are currently celebrating in the gathering space of the church, which allows us the social distancing we need. We use one church entrance for coming in and one for going out. During Confessions times, please use the side entrances if you are simply coming to pray. Of course, we will reassess this when the weather changes and may have to move to the PAC.

MINISTRY to the HISPANIC COMMUNITY

Ellen Ward, Fr. John and I recently met with Fr. Satheesh, superior of the Servants of Charity in Grass Lake, MI. The members of that religious community have been helping us with our outreach and ministry to the Spanish speaking community in our region. At our meeting, Fr. Satheesh recommitted his order to continuing to assist us, and we shared many ideas on how we can work together and grow this important ministry. Our next plan is to meet with leaders of the Hispanic community and to share and chat with them about how we can all move forward together. In the meantime, I have a few dates that we would like to share with you, where we will celebrate together as a united community. Some of these are planned as outdoor Masses to allow greater attendance:

- **Sat, Oct 3- Solemnity of St. Francis of Assisi- outdoor bilingual Mass at 5pm.**
- **Mon, Nov 2- Día de Muertos- outdoor Spanish Mass at 7pm**
- **Tues, Dec 8- Feast of the Immaculate Conception- Spanish Mass at 7pm**
- **Sat, Dec 12- Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe- outdoor Spanish Mass at 5pm**

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Religious Education classes have begun this week with outdoor classes for the children and zoom options as well. Thank you to our catechists and the time, resources, and devotion that they give freely to teach our parish children the Faith. Many of our catechists have provided their own computers for zooming and we are deeply appreciative of them. Please keep the children and their families in your prayers. Classes meet Monday (bilingual) and Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings. Remember too, that the children are outdoors and take care in driving, especially on Sundays for Mass. If you have a child that still needs to sign up: see our website at: <https://www.stfrancisa2.com/kids/> or contact the Religious Education Office at stfreled@stfrancisa2.org or 734-821-2130 or 734-476-5640.

GETAWAY to MACKINAW

There is still plenty of time to join us for our Oct 11-14 getaway trip to Mackinaw Island. This trip is open to everyone, family and friends can join us! Details can be

found on our parish website www.stfrancisa2.com/ and on the CTS website <https://www.ctscentral.net/> or you can book directly through the Grand Hotel at this link <https://bit.ly/STFRANCIS>

YOUR PRAYERS!

After my last but one email, I received several emails regarding my call for prayers for healing of the nation and for a vaccine. Of course, it should be understood that prayer is never limited to any one or two items, but now and again it is appropriate to focus on particular matters that deserve our attention and prayer. Clearly, in this highly emotive political season with all the tensions that have engulfed our nation we need to pray for reconciliation and healing, justice, and peace. No matter what your politics, NO ONE is beyond the need for prayer! We are all in need of God's grace and strength and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And our nation needs it more than ever in these difficult days. So, as we pray, let us also work for peace in our world, for an end to discrimination and for a successful vaccine for this terrible virus.

Finally, please keep an eye on our parish website for other details and events and remember that here at SFA you and your loved ones are always in our thoughts and prayers- so please stay safe!

Fr. James

<https://www.stfrancisa2.com/>