

# 22nd Sunday C; 125th Anniversary of St. Clement I; Lansdowne, MD

## I. Introduction

A. It is a joy to return to St. Clement Parish and to join you in celebrating the 125th anniversary of its founding. With you I give thanks to the Lord for many blessings which, for more than a century, he has showered upon this parish. Among those blessings is Deacon Paul Gifford who ably serves as your Parish Life Director (PLD), together with Fr. Thomas Malia and Fr. Roger Brito and Deacons Carlos Dutan and Hugh Mills. Let's thank them for their leadership and service!

B. Even though 125 years seems like a long time, the origins of the parish are actually much older. From colonial times, when this area was a farming community, the seeds of faith were already being planted. With the discovery of iron ore and later with the building of railroads and still later with the post-World War II expansion, Lansdowne began change and to grow.

C. Meanwhile, Catholics in the late 19th century were traveling by horse and buggy to St. Jerome Parish in Baltimore for Mass and for the sacraments. After a time, they asked the Pastor of St. Jerome, Father Holden, to send priests to Lansdowne to minister to their spiritual needs. By 1891 St. Clement was established as a mission of St. Jerome's and by 1895 it has its first buildings and its first pastor, Fr. Michael Sullivan.

D. It was not all smooth sailing. There were fires, loss of records, unwelcome visits by the KKK, the untimely deaths of several pastors, and unsettling periods in which pastors did not long remain at St. Clement Parish. Yet in God's grace the parish community persevered and working with a number of extraordinary pastors, built up the parish and opened a parochial school. Among those outstanding pastors the name of Fr. Cornelius Byrnes comes to mind. He served as pastor for 18 years and was a tremendous builder. We think too of the religious Sisters; they played a vital role in the life of the parish, including the Daughters of Charity and the Sisters of

Providence. Today that legacy continues through the Sisters' Academy under the leadership of Sr. Delia Dowling, a School Sister of Notre Dame, Patricia Ruppert, the Principal, and its dedicated staff and teachers. Let us express our warmest thanks to them!

E. Most of all, we thank the thousands of families and individuals who have been parishioners here at St. Clement over the years. Here they received the sacraments, listened to God's Word, received instruction in the faith, found their vocation in life, and raised their families, all while serving the poor and vulnerable. We prayerfully remember those parishioners who have gone before us in faith.

F. This morning we also gratefully remember two special vocations from the parish of St. Clement, Father Walter McGovern, a priest of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and Sister Ann Phelan of the Sisters of Providence. They have served the Church most generously and effectively. I ask you to pray that more vocations will come from this parish; in fact, I am sure God is calling some young people in church this morning to serve the Church as priests and religious. I hope you will answer his call generously!

G. In recent years St. Clement Parish has entered a new phase of its life as it continues to serve families who have lived for years in this neighborhood and happily welcomes those who have arrived here more recently, including a growing number of Hispanic parishioners. In a diversity of language, culture, and gifts you come together as a family of faith, worship, and service.

## **II. Different Times; Same Mission**

A. Yes, the times have changed greatly since the early days of St. Clement Parish. The surrounding community, the parish itself, and indeed the Church have changed in ways the pioneering members of this parish family could not have envisioned. Yet, even if the times and circumstances constantly change, the essential mission of St. Clement Parish remains the same. It is to preach, teach, sanctify, and guide so that this parish family might approach, with worthiness and joy, God's House, our heavenly home, portrayed in today's reading from the Letter to the Hebrews.

B. In that reading the author gives us a glimpse of heaven. It is not a place of 'sound

and fury' or of conflict and competition, but rather a place of peace, joy, trust, and refreshment. Seeing God face to face, those who enter the bright portal of heaven will be surrounded by "countless angels" in all their beauty and by "the spirits of the just made perfect", that is, the saints. This is our true home for which we long and toward which we travel as pilgrims through this "vale of tears".

C. As we journey through life's joys and sorrows, we seek not merely to survive but indeed to become holy so as to enter the Presence of the One who is all holy; we seek not merely to get along with others but indeed to become perfect in love so as to enter the Presence of the God who is love. Your parish, your spiritual home on earth, seeks to be that place where each of you and the community as a whole is guided along the path of holiness and love by Word, Sacrament, & respectful love of the poor.

### **III. Humility Is the Key**

A. Becoming perfect in holiness and perfect and love seems like a tall order. In fact, it is impossible for us to achieve on our own, that is to say without that assistance God gives us called "grace". But where do we begin on the path to holiness and love?

B. Today's readings from the Book of Sirach and the Gospel reading from Matthew (about taking the lowest place at table) - give us the key to holiness and charity. That key is humility - the virtue that helps us to see ourselves as we really are, in the sight of God and in the sight of others. It is the virtue that helps us to lay aside our self-importance and instead to "defer to one another out of reverence for Christ" - even as we acknowledge our utter dependence upon the Lord's redeeming love.

C. When we acknowledge our dependence upon the Lord's mercy, we, in effect, 'give God permission' to "renew our inmost being" - to correct our faults and to enable us to love as God has first loved us - a love that includes our enemies & those who cannot repay us 'measure for measure'. As we grow in humility, we also grow in joy and openness to God and one another. We become more and more unified and better able to witness to Christ, inviting home those who no longer practice the faith and welcoming those who are searching for truth and love.

D. Let me leave you with the words of your patron, Pope St. Clement I: "How blessed and amazing are God's gifts, dear friends. Life with immortality, splendor with righteousness, truth with confidence, faith with assurance, self-control with holiness... And all these things are within our reach!" Through the intercession of Pope St. Clement I may God keep each of you and this parish community in his love!