

# A Word From Fr. Tom Niehaus

## September 8, 2019



### **Freedom in Christ**

Throughout the Catholic Church this weekend, people of faith will hear the Scripture proclaimed from the Letter of St. Paul to Philemon. This seemingly obscure and short New Testament Letter is actually quite profound in its content and message. St. Paul is writing this letter to a Christian convert named Philemon (fill-e-mon) his wife Apphia (app-fia) and fellow Christian convert Archippus (ark-e-pus) as well as the local community that gathers at their house for the Lord's Day. This new Christian family from Colossae located in Southwestern Turkey, presumably owned a slave named Onesimus (oh-naze-e-moose) who ran away from his master and was converted to Christianity by St. Paul. This letter is essentially a travel document that St. Paul sent with Onesimus on his way back to his master. The paradox of the letter is that Onesimus escaped from the clutches of his master, a slave seeking earthly freedom and after finding His faith in Christ and possessing the freedom of God, he returns to this family of his own accord a fellow believer in Jesus Christ. St. Paul shows that he has great love for all of those involved in this situation as he writes, "I give thanks to my God always, remembering you in my prayers, as I hear of the love and the faith you have in the Lord Jesus and for all the holy ones, so that your partnership in the faith may become effective in recognizing every good there is in us that leads to Christ (Phil. 4-6)." St. Paul in writing this letter makes an appeal on behalf of the slave Onesimus, that he is to be treated well and to be considered as a missionary of the Gospel with St. Paul. Rather than using threatening language, St. Paul urges Philemon to listen to this appeal made in love from the pen of an old man who is also in prison for the name of Jesus. St. Paul indicates that he would like Onesimus to work with him for the sake of the Gospel, but would not do so without permission of Philemon. With respect and Christian affection St. Paul then indicates that Onesimus could be taken back into the family, "...no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a brother, beloved especially to me, but even more so to you, as a man and in the Lord. So if you regard me as a partner, welcome him as you would me (Phil 16-17)." This letter deals with the difficult topic of human slavery. St. Paul with a mature faith rooted in Jesus Christ, offers through this letter the truth of equality that is to be found among baptized people, namely, equality in the family of Jesus. By proclaiming a slave as a brother, St. Paul as a Roman citizen and Jewish convert to Christianity, presents a radical countercultural reality that the bonds that are found through Baptism offer a new life in Christ that not only destroys the ancient shackles of sin and death but also blows apart the societal system that determined what it meant to be slave or free man. Take some time in prayer this week to give thanks to God for the freedom we have received as members of the family of Jesus Christ!

### **St. Canice Festival**

Sunday September 8, 2019 is the Fall Festival at St. Canice Campus of the Most Holy Redeemer Parish located in Kilkenny, MN. Come for the dinner, raffle, games, and activities for all ages. All the events follow the Holy Mass celebrated at 10:00 am. Come join in the fun!

God bless you!

Fr. Tom Niehaus