

Saint Mary's Catholic Church

111 Hampton Avenue
Greenville, South Carolina 29601
864.271.8422 Phone
864.370.9880 Fax
www.stmarysgvl.org



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Palm Sunday

Dear Friends in Christ,

This has been a difficult year to be a Catholic.

Sex abuse scandals both near and far reminded us of the great harm done by too many priests to innocent young people and taught us again that the Church is always in need of being reformed and purified. Pope Francis was accused by one of his former ambassadors of having failed to act properly in response to the misconduct of a senior cardinal who has now been laicized for his crimes, but the pope has yet to give an adequate response to the charges of his own failure. And despite a meeting of bishops in Rome last February to discuss a common strategy for dealing with this crisis, too many bishops remain unwilling or unable to take the measure of this misery and lead us forward.

Yes, this has been a difficult year to be a Catholic, but when is it not? When I was a newly baptized Christian trying to decide whether or not to be received into full communion with the Catholic Church, one of the men who helped me along the way to my decision told me that he regarded being a faithful Catholic as possibly the hardest way to live and the easiest way to die. By this he meant that living according to the Gospel and striving to think and act in harmony with the mind of the Church requires great sacrifice and constant vigilance because such a life makes us a sign of contradiction in the world and pits us against the mystery of lawlessness in our own hearts, and this is a hard way to live. At the same time, if we live each day of our lives by faith, hope, and love against the horizon of our death and judgment, then we find both wisdom and peace to sustain us in our struggle now, and when the moment of death arrives for a faithful Catholic, the way is already prepared.

I think my friend was right in his estimation of how hard it is to live as a faithful Catholic and, having done so, how easy it is to welcome death, and this salutary truth is brought into bright relief for all of us during Holy Week. The texts of the sacred liturgy from Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion through Easter Sunday of the Lord's Resurrection return over and over again to the cost of discipleship, the burden of the Cross, the hope of the new life of grace, and the glory of the life to come. Yes, this has been a difficult year to

be a Catholic, but if we do it well, it is always difficult to be a Catholic. The crucified and risen Lord Jesus calls us to walk with him in the Way of the Cross so that we may one day share in his glory with all the saints in light.

If you are among those who have struggled in the past year to remain a faithful Catholic, then I hope you will come to Mass this week and to the liturgies of the Paschal Triduum to hear again the life-giving and life-changing Word of God which is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Allow Holy Scripture and the Sacred Mysteries of the New Covenant to open your hearts and minds once again to the truth of the Gospel which sets us free from sin and death and is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who has faith.

And if the sins of bishops and priests are among the reasons you find it difficult to remain a Catholic or practice the faith, then please consider this: The Lord Jesus personally chose the Twelve to be the foundation stones of his Church. They symbolically connect the Church to the Twelve Tribes of Israel, and Christ entrusted to the Twelve the apostolic ministry of teaching, sanctifying, and governing his Church in his own name and with his own messianic authority. And when the Hour arrived for which God the Son became the Son of Man and came into the world, what did these chosen Twelve do? Peter, James, and John went to sleep; they all fled in fear to avoid sharing his fate; Peter denied three times even knowing him; and Judas Iscariot betrayed him and handed him over to death for money. In other words, sloth, cowardice, mendacity, greed, and treachery were found among the apostles from the very beginning, and the Lord Jesus chose these men anyway. So do not let the sins and crimes of the clergy keep you away from Jesus Christ or the Church which he founded to be the instrument of his grace for the salvation of the world.

Enclosed with this letter is a complete schedule of all the celebrations in Holy Week, and I invite you to participate fully each day, most especially in the Paschal Triduum. There is no better way to understand more deeply why we should make the hard choices needed to live as faithful Catholics so that we can come to the end of our lives without regrets or fear of the judgment that awaits us all. Put most simply, without crucifixion there can be no resurrection, and Jesus Christ alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Praised be Jesus Christ. Now and forever!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jay Scott Newman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Father Jay Scott Newman
Pastor of Saint Mary's Church