

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I received many nice gifts at Christmas. Some came in boxes and others in envelopes but three of the finest gifts I received came as an email, a Face Book message and a text.

The email came from a young dad in the parish who wrote: ***Just wanted to send a quick note to thank you for all you did for all of us the last 6 weeks of Advent and Christmas. It was such a wonderful season for me. I learned a lot from your homilies, especially the family message you delivered yesterday.***

What a gift it was to know that our efforts to offer not just a special holy day like Christmas but, indeed, a whole season of prayer and faith were successful! The world around us, especially in its commercial aspects, is stiff competition for those working to provide a season of spiritual preparation for Christmas. To know that our parish met that need and was able to communicate a message brings a deep satisfaction to a pastor's heart.

The Face Book message I received (from a high school friend I haven't seen in decades) was in reference to my blog: ***For the past 5 years, I have read your blog pretty faithfully. I don't often leave comments but I've been influenced many times by your posts. Your "Two Word Prayers" are my morning prayer. When I was hospitalized last year and in rehab, my physical movement was restricted so one of the nurses would read your morning prayer to me from my iPad. One particular day when I just wasn't at my best, your post on the scripture about "finishing the race" (2 Timothy 4:7) really resonated with me... Last year, I began the year by writing about the "10 Top Stories" of my life, as suggested by your New Year's post. This really helped me put into perspective all that had happened in 2016. I will start working on my 2017 stories tomorrow... I believe that God uses you to bring messages of hope and joy to everyone who reads your blog I thank you for this from the bottom of my heart. You really can't imagine how uplifting all you write is. May God bless you, and may you have a wonderful year ahead.***

Writing my blog is part of my own daily prayer life and I'm delighted to share that with others. That I love writing my blog and others love reading it is a win-win situation and for that I'm grateful to God. And again, to know that my efforts are achieving just what I hope and pray they will is a great gift to me at Christmas - or at any time of the year!

Finally, a text I received included these words: ***Thanks so very much for all the meaningful thoughts that you have shared over the almost 20 years that I have been a parishioner at OLHC and HF parishes. You have blessed my prayer life in many ways, especially in how you "pray" Sunday Mass: you are never on "autopilot!" How you celebrate Mass has helped to deepen my spiritual life and I thank you for that! May God bless you and keep you in his care.***

This text was a gift because it touched on something I try to do all the time and that is to not just say Mass but to pray it. There is a double-sided grace here, too. For my own spirituality, it's important that I avoid slipping into an "autopilot" approach and since it's my work to lead you prayer, it's important that I be praying myself. It was a blessing for me for someone to mention this and its importance for her own prayer life.

Three wonderful Christmas gifts to carry with me into the new year! Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming