

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As I'm sure you know by now, with nearly a unanimous vote Town Meeting in Concord approved the acquisition of our parish office building at 55 Church Street for the sum of \$1,060,000. As you also know, we will use that money along with some parish savings to renovate and re-purpose the rectory for use as parish offices and meeting space. We expect to pass papers in July and after that we will temporarily relocate our parish offices to the lower level of the church, using about half of the main room there for cubicle office space. Work on the rectory will begin in the early fall and at that time I will move to another rectory in the vicinity (a location yet to be determined). We expect the work to be completed in a year's time. As I have more specific dates and information, I will share those with you on the parish website and in the bulletin.

Last fall as we faced the election of a new president, some parishioners wrote and spoke to me asking if I planned to preach or write as a pastor on the choices facing the electorate. As you know, I did not. That's due in large measure to the church's guidelines which can be summed up in this statement from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: *We strongly urge all parishioners to register, to become informed on key issues, and to vote. The Church does not support or oppose any candidate, but seeks to focus attention on the moral and human dimensions of issues. We do not authorize the distribution of partisan political materials on parish property. Of course, even "to focus attention on the moral and human dimensions of issues" can often be used as a way of endorsing a particular candidate - or be interpreted as such - especially when the candidates are sharply divided on particular issues. That leaves the preacher in a predicament: how does one preach on issues without appearing to endorse a particular candidate?*

Since the election parishioners have asked if I plan to preach or write on issues such as immigration reform or the debate on health care. Apart from a few homiletic references to these topics I haven't offered any substantial comment on them. I have several reasons for this which I want to share with you here.

For nearly a year now the political conversation in our country has been passionate and emotional, often filled with venom and vitriol. None of this contributes to a reasoned debate based on evidence. When you add to this that the issues being debated are complex and not nearly as simple as either side makes them out to be then you have a situation where feelings easily and often substitute for facts. And all of this in the era of "fake news!" Perhaps you can see why a pastor, a preacher, would enter such an arena cautiously and not wanting to appear to be siding with one political party or the other.

The gospel and tradition have much to say and teach us about the hot button issues of the day. The difficulty comes in trying to faithfully and objectively apply Christian values in a debate which is so hostile and volatile. Last Sunday afternoon I received an email from a parishioner between the 10:30 and 5:00 masses. This man wrote hoping that he might hear a word at the 5:00 liturgy to help him deal with his disappointment and anger in the face of the contemporary political scene. His message was reasoned and articulate and indeed at the 5:00 mass I did tweak my homily in light of his email. Working to do that opened me up in to a different way I might have worked with that weekend's scriptures - and some ideas about how I might do so in the future. I will look for ways to approach such concerns responsibly but always with care to avoid drawing us into that fractious fray of mean-spirited shouting and name-calling that passes for debate and reporting today. Pray that I might preach the gospel in such a fashion that it's law of love shine on those moral issues facing us as God's people in the world today.

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming