

19<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time  
August 7, 2011  
Fr. Tom Elliott

## Nesting for a New Pastor

1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a  
Psalm 85  
Romans 9:1-5  
Matthew 14:22-23

Preparing for a new baby is an exciting time for married couples, filled with many emotions. When couples look at the practical aspects of the new baby's arrival, they often find themselves filled with fear and anxiety. They think about the fact that they won't be able to understand the baby—they won't know if the baby is hungry, hurt, or tired. Couples might find themselves anxious about whether they have the tools and skills necessary to care for a baby. These feelings, though, are overshadowed by the **love** they have for the child; this love impels the couple to begin preparing for the new arrival. This preparation is referred to as "nesting."

Preparing for a new pastor is very similar to preparing for a new baby. I'm not suggesting, of course, that pastors are like babies... however, their arrival requires love and a certain form of "nesting." Let's look first at the love that is required and then we'll look at nesting.

Love for a new pastor has nothing to do with *who he is or what he does*, just like the love that parents have for their new-born child has nothing to do with who he or she is or what they are capable of doing. A new-born child has done *nothing* to deserve love. Parents love their children, however, because they understand them to be **gifts for God**. The same thing is true with a new pastor.

Parishioners welcome a new pastor in love because they have come to a prayerful awareness that he is a gift from God. This coming week is an important time for our parish to deepen our gratitude for the gift of Fr. Kevin. It is a time for us to become aware of the sacrifices he has made to serve the Church in Arkansas—leaving his family and friends in order to be a missionary in the United States, setting aside his aspirations of further studies in order to serve in parishes in Arkansas, dealing with the prejudices often found in the South, etc. Through Fr. Kevin's generous response to God's call to the priesthood, Christ the King Catholic Church will have a pastor!

In addition to growing in our love for Fr. Kevin in preparation for his arrival, it is important for us to be nesting, which requires us to make a "space" for the new pastor. By the word, "space," I am referring to numerous things. While we obviously need to create a *physical* space for Fr. Kevin, it is just as important for us to create a "space" in our *hearts* for his arrival.

The parish staff went on a one-day retreat a couple of weeks ago. As we sat around visiting, one of the staff members explained that, after she found out that I was being transferred and that Fr. Kevin was going to be the new pastor, she realized that she did not know anything about Africa or Nigeria. For the last few weeks, she has been getting on the internet and learning about Fr. Kevin's country. She has been listening to African music and deepening her appreciation for their culture. As she described this, my heart was deeply touched! This is nesting! She has been creating a space in her heart to receive her new pastor! This is what love entails and requires!

My hope and prayer is that this coming week is a special time for all of you to be prayerfully preparing to receive and welcome your new pastor. As I've mentioned, this requires us to deepen our love for him and create a space in our hearts for him. In closing, I would like to share with all of you a couple of Scripture passages about receiving others. In numerous places in the New Testament, Saint Paul commended someone to a community with which he was familiar. He asked those communities to receive and welcome his guests out of love and respect for him. One example can be found in the letter of Paul to the Philippians, in which Paul wrote—

With regard to Epaphroditus, my brother and co-worker and fellow soldier... I consider it necessary to send him to you. I send him therefore with the greater eagerness, so that, on seeing him, you may rejoice again, and I may have less anxiety. Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy and hold such people in esteem...

-Philippians 2:25, 28-29

Jesus said something very similar to His disciples in the Gospel of Matthew when He told them, "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me" (Matthew 10:40).

### **SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:**

- ✚ Go online and learn one new thing about Nigeria. Take that information to prayer and ask God to let it be a source of greater love and appreciation for the gift of your new pastor, Fr. Kevin.