

ST. FRANCIS CATHOLIC CEMETERY

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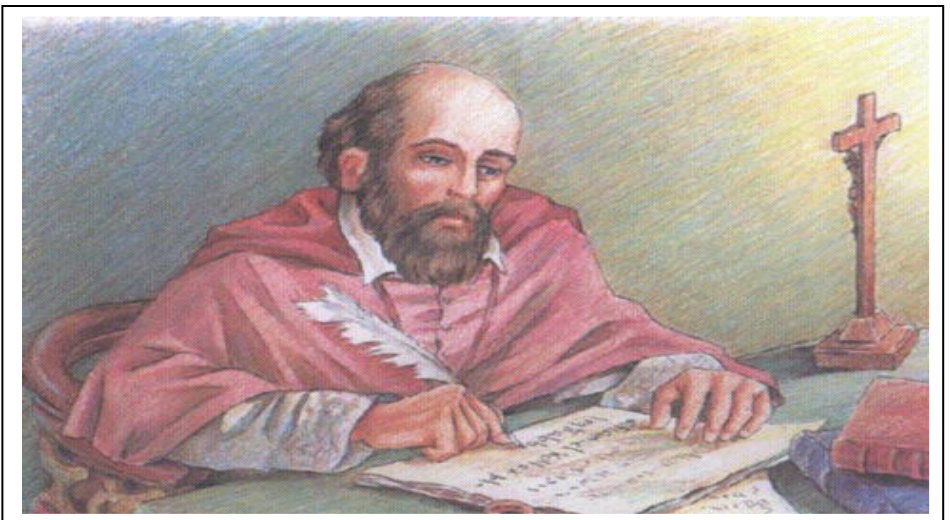
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Understanding the Value of Our Spiritual and Emotional Life

Fr. Bruce Siket

We are at a time in our world history where we are struggling to understand the value of the things around us that we use every day. The value of our money changes daily against the yen and the euro. The value of our nest eggs and retirement funds decreases everyday, the price of gasoline and fuel oil rise and fall with no apparent cause. The Stock Market has lost trillions of dollars worth of value, but none of the companies that make up the stock exchange have changed just the perceptions and opinions of a handful of influential people. Almost everything we use can be replaced or disposed of with almost no effort. We cannot seem to place a stable value on these things of life and this causes us to be filled with anxiety and fear about the future.

I am not suggesting that I have an answer for this, in fact, in place of an answer, I have a question: "Is it possible that our lack of understanding of the value of the material things in our lives has spread to include a lack of understanding the value of the spiritual and emotional elements in our lives?" In our search for stable values in our lives,

how much time and effort goes into preparing for the one certainty in this changing world, our death. We all know deep down inside, that our loved ones and ourselves will face this departure from this world at some point in time. Most of us try to put it out of our minds and not think about it. This may give us a brief respite, but eventually we must face this unpleasantness. The Church, throughout its history, has always tried to bring hope and comfort to those left behind. It has instituted the Sacrament of the Sick and Viaticum as a blessing and nourishment for souls as they transition out of this life. The Church's beliefs are summarized in its Creed's which talk about the resurrection of the dead and eternal life in heaven. The foundation of our theology is that we are a mortal body joined with an immortal soul which continues on after the body dies. Our immortal soul is affected by how we live our lives in this world. In addition, the Church is a very strong advocate for the dignity of each human life and also for the dignity of each person's death. We believe that God's gift of life should only be ended by God himself.

With this in mind, the Church has established a series of rituals that occur at the time of a person's death. We start with "Prayers for the Dead" which are prayed after the person has passed, usually in the presence of family and friends. These prayers include exhortations of God's mercy on the

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deceased along with Scripture readings and the Lord's Prayer. They are ended with a prayer of commendation where the deceased is placed in the loving hands of the Lord with the hope of eternal life in heaven. The Church continues to pray for the deceased and to offer comfort and support to family and friends through the three part funeral rites, which consists of the Vigil Rite and Prayers, the Funeral Liturgy, and the Rite of Committal. Each of these is meant to unite the family and friends of the deceased person in both prayer and mutual support following the constant theme of God's love and mercy for us and the hope of our resurrection into heaven.

The Vigil Rite is done prior to the Funeral Liturgy and is usually done at the funeral home but can be done in the home or the church or any place where people gather in the presence of the body. The Rite consists of a greeting of those present followed by an invitation to pray. An opening prayer reflecting on God's love and mercy with the hope of eternal life is next, followed by one or two readings from Scripture. A set of intercessions acknowledging God's power and mercy precedes the Lord's Prayer. The rite is concluded with a prayer asking God's mercy on the deceased and God's strength and comfort on us who remain, followed by a blessing on all present. Most often this Rite is done at the funeral home during visiting hours and may be preceded or followed by other prayers of family and friends such as the Rosary.

The Funeral Liturgy or Mass is the core of the Church's farewell to the deceased. The body or cremains of the deceased are brought to the church one last time for its final blessings and prayers. Family and friends gather for one last goodbye. The Funeral Mass is the same as any other Mass with the exceptions that at the beginning, the body or cremains are met at the church entrance where the greeting is given and the deceased is blessed with holy water and is taken in procession to the sanctuary. At the end of Mass, the

remains are incensed and are taken out in procession. The Scripture readings, prayers and intercession are all directed to call upon God's love and mercy for the deceased and for God's strength and peace for those left here on earth. The focus of this liturgy is one of prayerful hope. Beside the sprinkling with holy water and the final incensing, one more symbol is used; the Paschal candle is lit and placed near the body. This is to remind us of our connection with Jesus in our baptism and that he is the "light" that guides us on our earthly journey toward heaven.

The Rite of Committal is the last event in the funeral rite. It happens before the body is placed in its final resting place, usually in the cemetery at the graveside, but it can be done in the church. All are invited to pray for the deceased and themselves. If the grave site has not been blessed, a prayer is said to hallow the ground. The Committal prayer is prayed, reminding us that we are all mortal beings in this life and we too will meet this same fate. Intercessions are recited followed by the Lord's Prayer. The concluding prayer is finished with a blessing of all those gathered there. The person is then laid to rest.

The focus of all rites of the Church that pertain to death and dying are two-fold: First, to pray that the love and mercy of God embraces the deceased and leads them to heaven. Second, that God blesses those left behind with strength and peace, to continue on with our own journeys through life. This is all based on the Church's unwavering commitment to the sanctity and dignity of each human life from the moment of conception to death. This dignity is to be maintained even after death in the hallowed ground of our cemeteries. Our theology calls for a reuniting of our body and soul in a general resurrection in the future. With this in mind, the Church stresses the need for the complete burial of either the body or the cremains, so that the body, in its entirety, may await this reunion.

I asked a question earlier about whether our modern society has lost the understanding of the value of our

spiritual and emotional needs. I see more and more instances of people dispensing with many of the traditional ways of gathering people to mourn and grieve in community. More and more people are having neither funeral home visiting hours nor a Funeral Mass. This deprives the deceased of one last connection with the church community that hopefully has been a major part of their lives. This also deprives family members the opportunity of gathering together in prayer, seeking God's mercy for their loved ones and God's peace for themselves. Lastly, this may deprive family and friends the chance to celebrate a life, grieve that this wonderful life is over and to start the process of continuing on in life without the physical presence of their loved ones. There is great value to our emotional and spiritual well-being in gathering together, praying for the deceased and for ourselves, and in sharing the pain of loss and the hope of eternal life. May God Bless you!

Rev. Bruce Siket, Parochial Vicar of Corpus Christi Parish in the Greater Waterville, grew up in Madison, the son of Michael and Irene Siket. He has one sibling, a brother, Arthur. He attended the local public schools through high school. After graduation, he attended the University of Maine at Orono, where he received a Bachelor's Degree in Physics. This started a career in the paper industry that lasted almost 30 years as an engineer and supervisor and took him to many parts of the country. He met his wife, Anastasia (Stacy for short), in New York state, where they both worked for International Paper. Several transfers and job changes later they arrived in Millinocket where they stayed until Stacy's death in 2001. After her passing, he contacted the Diocese about the possibility of priesthood. After much discerning, he started seminary at Blessed John XIII in Massachusetts in 2003. He completed his studies in 2007 and was ordained in Madison on May 20, 2007.





Christmas Wreath Fund Raiser

Our third annual Christmas wreath sale to benefit the Halde Cemetery went very well. Actually it went much better than expected given the state of the economy. In all we sold 191 wreaths bringing in a total of \$2,203.00 after expenses. All proceeds will go to benefit the Halde Cemetery. These funds, along with our annual parish collection and donations from the Bourque-Lanigan Post #5 and others continue to add up bringing our total account balance to \$33,143.21 after last summer's maintenance expenses.

Last year we lost our long time employee, Merton Sprague, who took extremely good care of the Halde Cemetery for eight years. We were fortunate to find someone very quickly to fill in last season. This year we will likely have to spend some savings to purchase equipment to continue caring for the cemetery as Mert used his own equipment. Regardless, we will continue caring for the cemetery and building a fund for future generations to work with.

We would like to thank our sponsors for making this newsletter possible.

The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of our sponsors.

Genealogy on the Web

If you are into genealogy, or just trying to find a friend or relative, we now have a searchable data base on the web where anyone with an internet connection can go to look up information on anyone buried in St. Francis Catholic Cemetery. Information is limited for security reasons such as identity theft. Yes, unfortunately, in the world we live in we even have to worry about identity theft after we are dead, but all the basic information is there for you to find the person you are looking for. You can even download a map of the cemetery from our web page, print it and take it with you to the cemetery to help you locate the lot you are looking for. The Maine Catholic Cemetery Committee has been working on this project for a while in hopes of eventually having all the Catholic cemeteries burial records available to the public on line. There are approximately 66 Catholic cemeteries in the Diocese so it will be a while before the listing is complete but for now St. Francis Catholic Cemetery is there along with five or six others. To access our web page go to www.portlanddiocese.net/stfranciscemetery. At the bottom of the page there are other related topics you can click on regarding the cemetery. If you want the genealogy data base click on cemeteries, a popup menu will appear, click on genealogy and choose from the list of cemeteries. Enter the last name of the person you are looking for. A list will appear of all those buried in the cemetery with that last name along with their first name and death date to help you narrow your search. Click on the person you want and the information will pop up. Older burials prior to 1953 may have less information because complete records were not kept prior to that year. If you have more information on an individual buried prior to that date that you would like to share with us please e-mail us that information. Please be sure any information you decide to forward to us is accurate and factual.

We hope this new data base will be helpful to you whether you are doing genealogy or just searching for a friend or relative.

Vigil & Solar Lights

St. Francis Catholic Cemetery has always banned vigil lights and solar lamps as well as other candles. Unfortunately year after year we continue to find them in the cemetery and remove them causing some people distress. While we realize it is difficult for some to understand how something seemingly harmless could be such a problem we do this with good reason. We have experienced two grass fires due to candles. Lights, vigil or solar, become a beacon for vandals and the destruction does not stop with breaking of a light. From there it often escalates to tipping over monuments. In one case, in another cemetery, wax from a smashed vigil light on one lot was poured over the monument on another lot permanently staining the stone. When solar lamps or vigil lights are broken, whether plastic or glass, pieces end up in the grass and become dangerous projectiles when struck with a lawn mower or grass trimmer injuring workers or visitors. The lights have become such a problem that they have been banned in all 66 Catholic cemeteries in the Diocese. We ask for your continued cooperation in keeping St. Francis Catholic Cemetery a clean and safe place to visit.

If you have a friend or family member who is planning to purchase a vigil light or solar lamp to place in the cemetery please inform them of the rule or suggest they check with the cemetery office. You might be saving them some money and disappointment.

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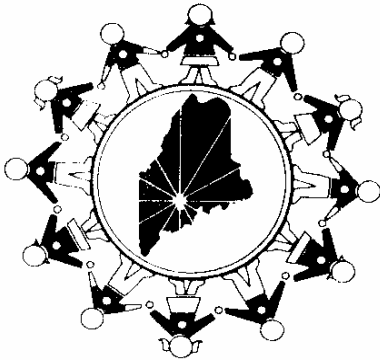
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