

Most of us are familiar with Jesus' 'Nazareth Manifesto,' as it is sometimes called, in which he reads from the prophet Isaiah.

***He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:***

***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”***

As we have heard throughout this evening, St. Joseph's is active and well-known for its work with the poor, the marginalised, those who are suffering in mind, body or spirit. We point with pride to our charism, made manifest through so many ministries, but in particular through the Supper Table and Women's Centre. Our reputation is well deserved – we are making a direct difference in the lives of many, showing true 'compassion' as we 'journey with' our brothers and sisters as they work to build better lives for themselves and their families.

We also increasingly have a reputation for our robust approach to the stewardship of our resources. We are well ahead of other parishes in the Ottawa diocese with respect to our financial policies. I have friends – both Catholic and other denominations, in Ottawa and across the country – who envy our rigour and have asked for copies of our policies so that they can copy or revise them for their own parishes. Our attention to this less appealing and often neglected-until-

too-late aspect of parish life has enabled us to balance our operating budget earlier than planned, giving us the room to consider the many wonderful ideas and other needs that members of staff and the community identify.

Our governance model, for all its hiccups and various operational corners that still need much polishing, is also well-regarded. There are many Roman Catholic parishes that are still living with parish councils that do little more than organise the annual Christmas pageant and picnic, even though those same parishes are also home to passionate, faith-filled people who want to help build God's kingdom. Like those establishing a new order throughout the millennia, we at St. Joe's struggle to make our governance model work as well as we envisioned when it was first established just 4 short years ago. Sometimes I think about how far we have to go. And then I remind myself, as I have said to more than one friend, that parliamentary democracy hardly worked perfectly when it was first established... and some of those friends have wisely – and wise-acre-ly – observed to me that it still doesn't...

But all these good works do not fully describe St. Joseph's. Throughout my tenure as Chairperson, I have said that were our society, humanity as a whole, to come to its senses and provide jobs and food and health care and homes and education for all, we would still need to come together each week to give praise to the Creator, to the Christ and to the Spirit of love, for our fundamental work is to be a people of faith.

And as a people of faith, we are blessed. Our liturgies, with their well-crafted and inclusive prayers and reflections, and music – the ‘best church choir in the city,’ I am reliably informed – offered as a true pastoral ministry, nourish and support us to deepen our faith. Our faith formation and spiritual growth activities reinforce our reputation for welcome and openness, encouraging those who are looking for a spiritual home to consider St. Joseph’s. The Diocese sends its ‘unusual’ situations to us, knowing that we live the words we speak, welcoming those who may not match the so-called norm while supporting them to find the eternal truths of our faith that can enrich their lives. Our numbers continue to grow, albeit, slowly, but in a secular age where fewer and fewer are active church-goers, this is a success.

But it does not stop with beautiful and meaningful liturgies of praise and thanksgiving, with an open embrace to those to come to us.

No, to truly be people of faith, we are called to be prophets; to ‘announce,’ to be ‘forth-tellers’ of the ‘truth’, as the early Canaanite word that prophet derives from, tells us. And I believe this is one of St. Joseph’s parish’s most important roles.

We are a community that through our work and liturgies, through our words and actions, whether in relation to our city, Canadian society, global industry, the Roman Catholic Church as a whole, or our own diocese, is willing to challenge those aspects of the status quo that imprison people in ignorance, that oppress people through shame, that allow the privileged to be blind to the needs of their

brothers and sisters and to the effects of their actions on God's creation. Daily, we try to 'comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.'

The words of the prophet Isaiah, repeated by Jesus in Luke's Gospel are often seen as an announcement of Jesus' identity as the Christ. And they are. But I think they are also a call to us, today, for we too, have been anointed to bring good news to the poor, to set the prisoner and the oppressed free, to make the blind see and the lame to dance. I believe that today, this scripture is still being fulfilled in our hearing.

It has been an honour and privilege to serve this community as Chair of Parish Council these last two years. I have had the opportunity to see, first hand, the work of so many staff and volunteers, and to bear witness to the deep and abiding faith that underlies your commitment to every aspect of our parish life. I have worked with dedicated men, women and children who generously give of their time, talent and treasure. I look at what you have done and what you are doing and I listen to the dreams of those who want to do more, and I think of the first prophet, Moses, and I say to myself 'I TOO have been to the mountain-top.'

Thank you, and God bless.