

Today's readings come from times of turmoil. We start the first reading with the words, "The Lord's way is not fair!" Paul writes the second reading from his prison cell, facing the possibility of death, not unlike the death of Jesus. Paul talks to the Church of Philippi with some of the strongest words in the epistles, "For to you has been granted, for the sake of Christ, not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him."

We are blessed to have a faith that has withstood these difficult times and many more. We also have the responsibility to live the gospel as Paul did through the turmoil of our present time.

Paul goes on to ask that we model our savior at all times, "Have in you the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus. He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave ... he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death." You can think of these as milestones of Christian life, and for most of us, they require a lifetime to master. I suggest we focus on step one, emptying ourselves, all the rest will become easier once we overcome this first hurdle.

When Christ EMPTIED himself, He left all his powers behind. He became human to get closer to us and help us get to heaven. We can think of Jesus as traveling light years to be with us and all we have to do is go the last inch to engage with Him. We do this first by emptying ourselves as Jesus did when he left His Father in Heaven.

Let's look at a few real-life examples of emptying...

Being willing to empty ourselves by taking over our spouse's responsibilities when they are sick.

Emptying ourselves of watching our favorite show to pray a rosary for a community member going in for surgery the next day.

Emptying part of our Saturday to take dinner to an aging parent.

The examples of emptying ourselves are as numerous as the believers engaging in them.

This work puts us in a place to do as Paul says, "humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also, for those of others."

When we put on Christ through the emptying process, we grow closer to him, because he's walked the earth and faced the same challenges, temptations, and frustrations we are going through. Christ became human and had to learn to be obedient and empty himself to the will of His Father, even to the point of death, death on a cross!

In 2nd Corinthians St. Paul writes, "We hold this treasure in earthen vessels." WE are the earthen vessels and the treasure we hold is the gift of God's blessings. A vessel is only useful if it can be emptied and filled, taken to where the need is, and emptied again. This is what makes

emptying ourselves so important. The more we let go, the more we can receive and distribute from the Lord.

This is difficult work; it was hard for Jesus and it's hard for us. However, Christ formed a Church, to be here to help us as a community and to offer many opportunities to grow in our faith.

Two weeks ago, as I was leaving the parish center, I noticed the conference room was packed with parishioners listening to Fr Ricardo give the Fall Bible Study. We are so blessed to have Fr Ricardo as our pastor, and we pray for him as he begins his second year at St James. He is very much alive in his role of bringing us closer to our Savior. He's also available to help us empty the guilt of our sins through Reconciliation.

Fr George is also a great blessing to our parish and will hear our confessions as well. He and VJ are focused on helping our youth grow deeper in THEIR faith. They recently started confirmation classes and recruited over a dozen youth leaders at the high school level to mentor other students. This year parents are invited to journey alongside their kids at meetings, another emptying opportunity.

St James is also blessed with a thriving school, wonderful teachers, students, and parents modeling Christ to the children of our community. Last week, twenty 5th graders crowded into the entrance of the Church to begin altar server training with Deacon Michael. These students were on a mission, anxious to take on their new role. After five years watching the mass from the pew, now was THEIR chance to BECOME altar servers as they empty themselves in service at the Lord's table.

These are only a few of the examples of how our parish community engages with each other in the difficult work of not only believing in Christ, but also suffering for him.

Love is a result of emptying ourselves and giving that space in our hearts to the Lord and each other. Let's reflect on how to learn from the example of Christ and bring Him into our daily lives, to serve the needs of those in our community, and to build up St James through participation in our many programs and ministries.