

**SAINT BARTHOLOMEW CATHOLIC CHURCH**  
**6902 River Road, Bethesda, Maryland 20817**  
**Tel 301-229-7933♦Fax 301-229-7998**

June 22, 2022

Dear St. Bartholomew Parishioners,

Almost one month ago, heads of parish ministries, along with many other parishioners, new and old to St. Bartholomew's, gathered for a Listening Session on the spiritual life of our parish. The 'listening' part was my work as your new pastor. The rest of the work came from those who attended as they voiced their desires regarding their hopes for the pathway of the spiritual life of our parish today and in the near years to come. I'm grateful for the prayerfulness and energy that led to such a fruitful evening. I was also very impressed and happy to see so much charity that evening in the love with which you treat each other and the love you have for this, your parish.

Our small, hardworking Spiritual Life crew compiled the comments and sorted them into common themes for me, and today, I'd like to share them with you. Before you read them though, I'd like to ask you to consider this work so far as Step One, and I'd like to invite you all to join in a very bold Step Two: **discernment**. I invite you to listen to the Lord, prayerfully, as we ask him and discern, "What is the desire of your heart, Lord, for this, your parish?"

If this sounds foreign to you, don't forget the words Jesus taught us in the Our Father: "*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.*" God has a plan, a desire, a will, for each of us. He certainly has one for his Church.

What we discern is the Will of God. How we do it is prayer. It could be as simple as reading our Listening Session Summary and offering a prayer like this; "Lord, here are the desires of our hearts regarding our parish spiritual life. What is YOUR desire? It is your Church Lord. Thy will be done." Then in the silence of prolonged prayer, we listen. What do you receive in prayer regarding this? This is the real Listening Session; listening to the Lord, and it is important work for all of us.

Pope Francis speaks often of this discernment, which is no surprise given his Jesuit background of Ignatius Spirituality. In *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and Be Glad), he meditates on how to joyfully respond to Christ's invitation to strive for holiness in daily life and writes beautifully about discernment (beginning on page 66).

On discernment, he says, "How can we know if something comes from the Holy Spirit or if it stems from the spirit of the world or the spirit of the devil? The only way is through discernment, which calls for something more than intelligence or common sense. It is a gift which we must implore. If we ask with confidence that the Holy Spirit grant us this gift, and then seek to develop it through prayer, reflection, reading and good counsel, then surely, we will grow in this spiritual endowment."

So, what is the will of God for our parish? What if it's bigger and better than any of or all the items on our list? What if it's freedom; freedom FROM fear and sin and freedom FOR love, the happiness for which we were created; true life?

The spiritual life is a great adventure. I can't wait to see where the Lord is taking us as a parish family. Please read the Listening Session Summary and pray along with me. Together, we can "*approach the mystery of God, who helps us to carry out the mission to which he has called us, for the good of our brothers and sisters.*"

Yours in Christ,

