

# ST. PATRICK

## CATHOLIC CHURCH



## MEET THE TOVAR FAMILY

*Serving God and  
Parish as the  
Body of Christ*

Through their service and involvement in St. Patrick's Parish, the members of the Tovar family have been doing their part to bring our Church alive. Claudia and

Epifanio Tovar have been active members of the parish for the past 23 years. They have helped serve the parish in many different ways over the years, but their main service has been to the church choir.

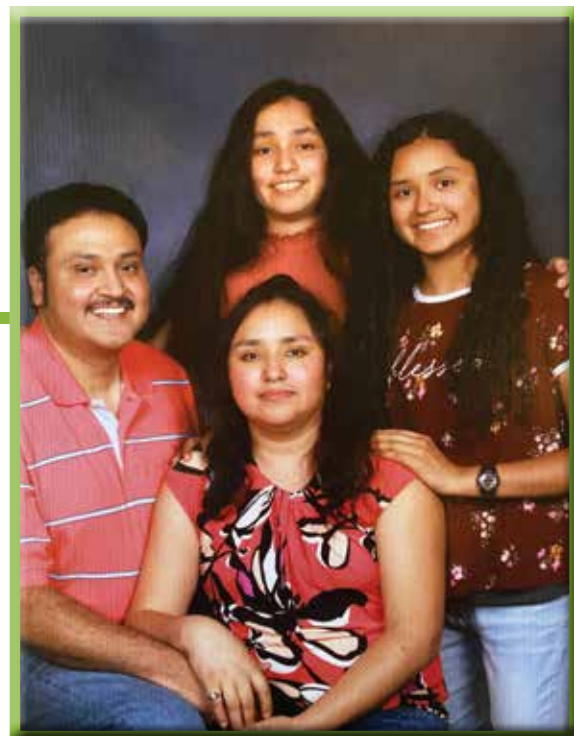
"We know that Jesus came to serve the world, and we as parishioners must serve our parish because we are part of the body of Christ and all parts are necessary," Claudia says. "Giving your talent and service to your parish is a way to attract other people and keep God's Church alive."

Claudia, with the help of her two teenage daughters and the support of her husband, has led our choir. She says that when she came to St. Patrick's, she wanted to serve in the choir and that desire has only grown over the years.

After a few years of participating, Claudia felt a strong urge to continue the ministry. At the time she only sang, so she asked a friend to teach her some notes on the guitar.

"I started looking for music books, and I started practicing and practicing — after three months, I was playing the guitar," she says. "I also understood that I was being given a gift of the Holy Spirit because of how quickly I learned."

In addition to leading the choir, Claudia has served as a catechist assistant, helping to teach the children of the parish about our faith. And in 2019, she served as a Faith Formation leader.



*The Tovar family*

### WEEKEND LITURGY:

**Saturday:** 5 p.m. (English), 7 p.m. (Spanish)

**Sunday:** 9 a.m. (English), 11 a.m. (Spanish),  
5 p.m. (English)

**First Saturday:** 9 a.m. (English), 7 p.m. (Spanish)

VER AL DORSO  
PARA ESPAÑOL



## *Stewardship*

# HANNAH THE GOOD STEWARD

What should we do when our prayers are answered?

Is there anything left to do after we have sincerely thanked God for His favors? If God were a human peer, we would probably try to reciprocate by granting Him a favor in return. But the truth is that God cannot be made greater by anything that we do for Him. Instead, God receives our thanks and tells us to “go and do likewise.” That is, He tells us to share with others the good that He has bestowed on us. And in doing so, we are really sharing God Himself. That is the definition of stewardship!

The Old Testament Book of Samuel contains one of the most poignant examples of stewardship in the entire Bible. The first chapter teaches us of an unhappy, barren woman named Hannah. Desperate in her barrenness, Hannah prays that God will give her a son, vowing that she will raise him to be a man of God.

Imagine Hannah’s elation when she was granted her prayer! When Samuel was born, her heart’s desire had come true! Imagine further the pang of motherly sorrow, as Hannah kept her promise to God by taking Samuel at a young age to be the servant of Eli, the high priest. The Book of Samuel tells us that once Samuel became Eli’s servant, Hannah saw her young son just once a year.

Indeed, Hannah knew that Samuel was truly a gift from God – an answered prayer. Hannah’s response is that of the Good Steward – with an attitude of both gratitude and sacrifice, she gave up her son to honor God. One imagines that Hannah probably struggled with this sacrifice during those first years. She probably did not know what God had in store for her son. Yet, through her



faithfulness, God used him as a gift to an entire nation. Samuel would, in time, become one of the greatest prophets of Jewish history.

Sometimes it is difficult to understand the sacrifices we make in the name of stewardship, while the results may just be impossible to miss! However, He asks that we continue to be faithful in either case. God has undoubtedly bestowed gifts on all of us – at whatever the cost, we are to “go and do likewise.”



# THE JOY OF LENT

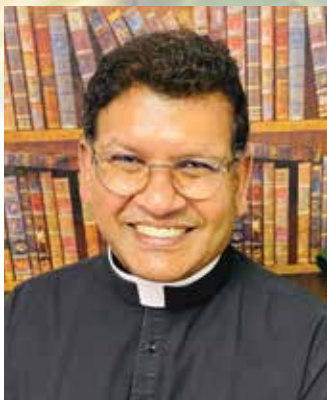
Dear Parishioners,

**H**ave you ever thought about the joy in sacrifice that Lent provides? Most of us don't delight in sacrifice; in fact, in our daily lives, we often do our best to avoid challenges and practices that push us outside of our comfort zones.

In Christianity, there is a beautiful irony between joy and sacrifice, and we are presented with a wonderful opportunity to embrace this uniquely during Lent. In one of his Lenten messages, Pope Francis shared, "Lent is a fitting time for self-denial; we would do well to ask ourselves what we can give up in order to help and enrich others by our own poverty."

While giving up sweets in favor of healthy snacks for Lent is a common and noble endeavor, the goal of Lent should not only be a spiritual excuse to lose weight! In choosing acts of self-denial, we are saying "no" to things in order to get into the practice of saying "no" when inclined towards sin, ultimately deepening our faith and our relationship with the Lord. Victory can be found when we deny ourselves and pick up our crosses and hardships in order to grow closer to Christ!

Therein lies the joy. When we grow closer to God by denying our will, we say "yes" to a life of abundance with Him. Our God is a benevolent God; He will not hold back



His grace from those who honor Him and choose challenging things to grow and give Him glory. Christ even tells us Himself, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Without question, Lent is a time for conscious penitence and spiritual preparation for Easter. And it is important to remember that God loves us whether we make Lenten changes or not. At the same time, Lent provides us an opportunity to make God a greater part of our life, and to take our faith to new levels. Stewardship is a God-centered

way of life — a spiritual way of living that, above all, acknowledges God's presence in all we do.

Lent is a time for every one of us to do more than simply deny ourselves; we need to welcome God into our lives in greater ways so that when we get to Holy Week and Easter, we have an even greater appreciation for the sacrifice the Lord made for us. Talk about pure joy!

May you and your loved ones enjoy a holy and joyous Lenten journey.

In Christ,

Fr. Denzil Vithanage, Pastor

## ENTERING INTO LENT

### *How We Can Make the Most of this Solemn, Sacred Season*

**H**ow might we make the most of this solemn, sacred season? There are three main aspects to Lent in which the Church asks us to engage — prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. We don't need to take on many things in order to make this season worthwhile, but it is important to consider how we might deepen our faith lives during this time of year.

Perhaps we might be inspired to take each aspect of Lent to heart, and pick something we can do within each category, so to speak, in order to truly enter into this sacred season. Each one — prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, provides us an opportunity to grow spiritually and prepare for Easter.

#### **PRAYER**

Let us start with prayer. In order to grow our personal and communal prayer lives, we need not spend the entire day in the chapel. Rather, perhaps consider adding one new devotion to your prayer life.

For example, if you aren't already spending time each day in prayer, maybe it's time to start spending five minutes each morning with the Lord while enjoying your breakfast and coffee. If you usually start your day by opening your computer and phone to check messages and emails, start instead with a morning prayer or Scripture, offering your day up for the Lord and whatever may come. If you already have a regular prayer routine, perhaps you might consider adding a daily Divine Mercy chaplet at 3 p.m. during the hour of mercy, or a family Rosary after supper cleanup.

#### **FASTING**

While we often think of food when it comes to fasting, there are other ways we can fast during Lent. Fasting means abstaining from something in order to grow spiritually. This could mean giving up Facebook or cutting down on internet use. Perhaps you might consider fasting from watching your favorite TV series and instead watch daily Mass. Another idea of fasting is giving up takeout or delivery and instead using that extra money to give to the poor.

#### **ALMSGIVING**

Giving alms may be the less obvious of the three but is no less important for growing spiritually. Giving alms can mean a number of things. Perhaps this means giving a bit of extra money to charity during these 40 days. It might also mean visiting with a grieving friend, listening, and helping out those in need. You might also consider stepping out and helping in a new capacity, whether in a new ministry or volunteer effort.

Lent affords us a wonderful opportunity to renew our spiritual lives. While it may not always seem so easy, it is necessary to use this time to prepare our hearts and lives for Easter. We might be tempted to simply look ahead to the joy of Easter without considering the sacrifice of Lent, but in that way, we would be missing out on the chance to grow, learn, give, and pray. We cannot have the Resurrection without the Cross. Lent is a reminder not to be filled with sadness and dread over our sacrifices, but to take up practices that help us engage in our spiritual lives, purify ourselves with God's help and rejoice when Easter comes around.



*Prayer  
Fasting  
Almsgiving*



# The Sixth Pillar of Parish Life: UNIFICATION OF CULTURES

## *Coming Together in Christ*

Parishioners at St. Patrick's come from many cultures. When we worship together, we bring with us our unique traditions and practices — and this serves to make our faith richer. It's like the lyrics of the John Michael Talbot song "We Are One Body," "We are one body, one body in Christ. And we do not stand alone. We are one body, one body in Christ. And He came that we might have life."

Fr. Denzil Vithanage is bringing focus to Seven Pillars of Parish Life that make St. Patrick's the best it can be — Unification of Cultures is the sixth pillar we will explore.

If you look at our parishioners, there are Irish, Germans, Latinos, Filipinos, and Nigerians. We have a lot to learn about each other's cultures. God desires that we be one through His body, so the Unification of Cultures Ministry was recently formed.

"We want to find ways to bring everyone together," Fr. Denzil says. "It's not easy. We learn to respect that we are a diverse group."

Maria Ibarra, who coordinates this ministry, wants everyone to know they are invited to all future events and meetings for the Unification of Cultures Ministry. She believes we must find ways to gather, especially since the pandemic and other events of the past few years have created so much division.

"It's important for the church to represent Jesus as much as possible to let all our parishioners know that we are all important and valued," Maria says. "In doing that and in offering different events, we evangelize."

Some potential ideas for the ministry are to celebrate Black History Month and to start a Filipino Mass. Maria and Fr. Denzil would also like to see everyone come to the Our Lady of Guadalupe celebrations. In addition, they hope to start a multicultural festival here at St. Patrick's.



*Children gathered for the Christmas program*



*Members of the Unification of Cultures Ministry with Fr. Denzil*

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## The Sixth Pillar of Parish Life: UNIFICATION OF CULTURES

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“We are the universal church,” Maria says. “Being Catholic means showing Jesus Christ to everyone to unite us as one big family.”

For Fr. Denzil, this ministry is really a way for all of us to continue to grow in faith. It’s an opportunity to see Christ in the faces of those sitting in the next pew.

“We want to know how we encounter Christ,” Fr. Denzil says. “How can we see Christ in each and every one of us?”

Ultimately, we are all “*juntos en Cristo*,” the Spanish phrase for “together in Christ.” Fr. Denzil wants us all to know that we are all one in Christ — no matter our country of origin or faith traditions.

In Pope Francis’s encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*, or “On Fraternity and Social Friendship,” he offers a beautiful

*If you would like to get involved in the Unification of Cultures Ministry, please contact Maria Ibarra at 936-635-6963.*



*Parishioners gathered for a Christmas reception*

quote that Fr. Denzil especially appreciates — “How wonderful would it be, even as we discover faraway planets, to rediscover the needs of the brothers and sisters who orbit around us” (31).

“Each time we are with each other, it’s a sacred encounter,” Fr. Denzil says.

Fr. Denzil looks forward to continuing to find ways to draw people together across cultures and continue to unify St. Patrick’s.

## Meet the Tovar Family *continued from front cover*

“Together as a family, the four of us came to prepare things that would be needed for the teachings of catechesis,” Claudia says. Epifanio helped keep the children safe in the school building and her daughters helped create the classes.

For Claudia and Epifanio, being in a ministry at St. Patrick’s was not always easy. In the midst of raising their family, being involved is a constant commitment they have made. They have been very intentional about the time and effort that they have dedicated to the parish. For them, this has meant getting the whole family involved.

“We believe that we all are given many talents to serve our Church,” Claudia says. “Unfortunately, as parents, we don’t always teach our children to offer that talent to God. For example, if our children read very well, why not have them participate as a lector on some Sundays?”

For the Tovar family, the Word of God has played a large role in their faith journey. It has been through listening to the Word of God that they have been led to the

knowledge that God loves them, and that as children of God, they are called to be participants in His Church.

“We all have talents,” Claudia says. “We have to discover them and not hide from them. Jesus Christ gave them to us so that we might serve Him.”

*“We know that Jesus came to serve the world, and we as parishioners must serve our parish because we are part of the body of Christ and all parts are necessary. Giving your talent and service to your parish is a way to attract other people and keep God’s Church alive.”*  
— Claudia Tovar