

***TURN UP THE FLAME***  
**KICK OFF WEEKEND, PHASE THREE**

March 5-6, 2011

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun

We begin with a **multiple choice question**.

It is not a trick question. There is one and only one correct answer.

Please be attentive and exercise good judgment.

The most important **reason** that this **parish exists** is:

- a) **to make the name of Jesus Christ known and loved;**
- b) to build an impressive church structure for our worship;
- c) to sponsor a school to educate our young people; or,
- d) to offer social justice ministry with outreach to the poor and the needy.

Do you have your answer, or would you like me to repeat your options?

Which is it? **A? B? C? or D?**

The answer is (a): **to make the name of Jesus Christ known and loved.**

The **reason** that we get together here for Mass here each week is because of **Jesus Christ**.

We believe that Jesus is the **Son of God**, the **Messiah**,  
our **Lord** and **Master**, *the Rock*, our solid **foundation**,  
our **Redeemer**, and the **Savior** of the world!

Do you believe this?

Let the Church say, "Amen!"

We are here because **we believe in Jesus**, and we are his **disciples**.

We are here because **we love Jesus**, and we have **dedicated our lives to him**,  
each in our own unique way!

We are here because **we believe**: not only in **Jesus**, but in our **Triune God**,  
**Jesus**, and his **Father**, and his abiding presence, the **Holy Spirit**.

Our Christian journey begins with **baptism**.

We are baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Then we, or our godparents are given a **baptismal candle**,

it is lit from the **Easter Candle**, because **Christ** is the **Light of the World** (Jn 8:12; 12:46).

*Christ, be our light!*

*Shine in our hearts! Shine through the darkness!*

*Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today!*

Each of us, we have **faith in Christ**.

The **light** of Christ burns brightly **in us**.

And then we run into **trouble**:  
our **faith wavers**, and the **light grows dim**,  
because of **doubt** and **sin**.

The people in Jesus' time had **no electricity**, no electric lights,  
so they lit their homes with **oil lamps**,  
clay dishes, with olive oil and white cloth wicks,  
and when the **wicks** got **charred**, the light dimmed,  
and when we are charred with **sin**, our **light goes down**,  
so we have to **trim away** our **sin** so the light of Christ might shine more brightly (Mt 25:7).

*Keep your lamps trimmed and burning!*  
*Keep your lamps trimmed and burning!*  
*Keep your lamps trimmed and burning!*  
*For this work is almost done!*

And our work, the work of our *Turn Up the Flame Campaign*,  
is to keep our **lamps trimmed** and **burning**,  
to get **rid of sin**, get **rid of doubt**, and let the light of Christ shine more brightly than ever.

So today we kick off **Phase Three** of our *Turn Up the Flame* “**capital**” campaign.

This **campaign** is **not** about **money**, it is about **FAITH**.

Often people talk about “**church fund raisers**,” like Mardi Gras;  
this is a “**church faith raiser!**”

Church faith-raising is far more important than church fund-raising.

If we do not give our faith the constant attention that it deserves,  
there will be slippage, we will grow lax, and we will get weaker.

But if we are to **fulfill** our **primary mission** as church,  
to **make the name of Jesus Christ known and loved**,  
we have to be on an **all-out campaign** to bolster our faith.

**Bishop Sheen** got me started on this.

I was reading one of his books, and he made a **striking observation**.

Bishop Sheen said, in a nutshell, “If parishes can do so much to raise money,  
**why can't they do an even better job to raise faith?**”

So three years ago we started with *Turn Up the Flame* campaign.

**Capital campaigns** normally last for **three years**,  
so this campaign was designed to have **three phases**.

**Capital campaigns** have **pledging**,  
so this campaign has had **pledging** in **Phase One** and **Phase Two** already,  
**check-off forms** for our intentions:

to **pray**, to **learn** more about our faith, and to do **good works**.

The **pledging** has not been one per household, but **one per person**.  
In each of the first two phases **over 2000 pledge sheets** were returned.  
Our parish has **new fire, a brighter flame,**  
**more energy, a stronger commitment** to the faith.

Even for those who did not return a pledge intention sheet in Phase One or Two,  
person after person told me that they were doing something to Turn Up their Flame.  
As a **parish** we are making **big progress for Jesus Christ,**  
**but we need to make more!**

Each household is receiving **a mailing this week** explaining Phase Three,  
and the mailing has a **refrigerator magnet,** a motivator, and reminder;  
and it has **one adult pledge sheet.**

This **last phase** has a nice new twist.  
Instead of three different kinds of **pledge forms,** now there are **four**.  
The **four forms** are **age-specific,** and in different sizes and shapes:  
one for **adults,** a folded sheet with an insert card;  
one for **high school students,** grades 9-12, tall and slender, with a tear-off card;  
one for **middle school students,** grades 6-8, like a bingo card;  
and one for **young students,** pre-school to 5, a brightly colored booklet.  
They are on the tables in the entryways.  
Please, if you haven't picked one up already,  
after Mass, please take one for each person in your household.

Please look it over carefully.  
Please pray over this.  
Please **consider what you might do** over these **next twelve months** to Turn Up your Flame.  
We will have a **Commitment Sunday** in **two weeks,**  
and it is my hope and prayer that you will have your intention card ready to return.

**Each Phase** of the campaign has a **point of emphasis,**  
but we are still going to pay attention to the **big picture** the whole way through.  
The **overall theme** is stated in our *Turn Up the Flame* prayer:  
“Strengthen our resolve to trim away all sin.  
Increase the flame of your Spirit within us,  
so our light will shine more brightly before others,  
that they might see our good deeds and glorify your holy name.”

The **three phases** are intended to **build momentum,** to **build a solid foundation.**  
Phase One was “**Learn Your Faith!**”  
Phase Two was “**Practice Your Faith!**”  
And now, our new phase, Phase Three, is “**Share Your Faith!**”

When we **share our faith,** we are **making the name of Jesus Christ known and loved**  
which is why we are church!

While we do this, we must not abandon Phases One and Two.  
We must constantly **keep learning more** about our faith and **keep practicing it better**,  
so on the new pledge forms, there are still options regarding **faith learning** and **faith practice**,  
but the **main emphasis** of the pledge form is on **faith sharing**.

### **Jesus asked his first disciples to share their faith.**

Jesus instructed them,

“Go tell what you hear and see” (Mt 11:4).

“Go home to your family and announce to them  
all that the Lord in his pity has done for you” (Mk 5:19).

“Go, make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19).

**Those instructions** given by Jesus to his first disciples **apply to us too**.

### **Share your faith!**

This is **not easy**. There are big hurdles here.

We tend to be **private** about our faith.

Often, when faith comes up, it is easier to be **quiet**.

It is safer to take a back seat, to be **silent**, to not say anything.

So the **first part** of the program is **not** about **outreach** to others,  
it is about **ourselves**, and **self-reflection**,  
and getting a better handle on our own faith,  
so we can be better at speaking about our faith, get more articulate.

We want to **begin gently, gradually**, with plenty of time for reflection,  
and then begin with **faith sharing** that is “**safe**,”

**not** with a **stranger**,

but with someone we know and trust,

someone who is not threatening, a spiritual partner,

a spouse, a parent, a child, a close spiritual friend,

so we can **help each other grow in faith**.

Over the next several months we are going to reflect on how to do this.

We need to explore **good strategies** for **faith sharing**.

**Jesus invited**, he was **gentle** without being pushy.

We want to **avoid overzealous evangelizing** like some denominations.

We want to **avoid spiritual arrogance**: “I’ve got the truth and I’m going to give it to you.”

**Faith sharing** is just that, **sharing, mutual**,  
**not one-sided**,

but **listening** to each other **respectfully**,

going **back and forth**,

sharing why **Jesus** and his **gospel** is so important to each of us,

seeing the **light in others**, and **letting our lights shine** before them (Mt 5:16).

So over these next couple of weeks,  
take a few minutes to **think about someone with whom you might share your faith.**  
If you are a **youngster**,  
your brother or sister, your mom or dad, a classmate.  
For the **adults**, to stimulate your thinking,  
there are a number of different categories on the adult form:  
a relative, a child, a teenager, a young adult,  
a neighbor, a co-worker,  
an inactive Catholic, or someone who is searching.  
You don't have to name anyone on the pledge form,  
but it is a good idea to **start thinking now**  
about some specific **individuals you might visit with later.**

And once we move into the **last six months of Phase III**,  
and as we hopefully **invite** some **folks** to join for **Mass** or **parish activity** or program,  
we need to reflect anew about what it means to be a welcoming community,  
because, as we sang in our opening song, "**All are welcome!**" here,  
and hopefully, we mean it.

**Turn Up the Flame III** – is great, and we have all sorts of **promotional items.**

Your **refrigerator magnet** is coming in the mail.

We have **new wrist bands**, not red, not orange, not yellow.  
Those who are older remember the Blue Flame Gas Association.  
**Blue** and **white** are the **hottest flames of all!**  
They are in **three sizes**: 7" (Medium), 8" (Large), and by popular demand, 9" (XL).  
This is not a "one size fits all" parish; we accommodate individual differences!  
They are excellent ways to give witness, great conversation starters.  
The new wrist bands are in the baskets on the tables at the exits.  
Please feel free to pick them up after Mass.

All **four pledge sheets** are on the tables; so everyone, please take the one right for you.  
The **first two pages of the bulletin** summarize the main points of this homily.  
And there are "**Turn Up the Flame**" **shirts**,  
black ones, white ones, \$10 for the T shirts, sold at cost, another witness opportunity.

My friends, **I really don't like fund raising.**  
**My dream** and whole **purpose** as a priest and pastor is to be a **faith raiser.**  
This is the **most important capital campaign** I will ever bring before you.  
**You love Jesus Christ, and so do I.**  
We need to **Turn Up our Flames!**  
We need to **learn** our faith, **practice** our faith, and **share** our faith.  
Our ultimate **purpose** as a faith community is  
to **make the name of Jesus Christ known and loved.**