

My niece Katlyn is getting married at the end of the month.

Three weeks ago, my sister-in-law asked me to make a short video to send to her. Everyone in the family was supposed to give Katlyn some advice about marriage. Well, not having personal experience to draw on, I offered some spiritual advice. I told Katlyn, “Take five full minutes every day (300 seconds), to pray for your spouse. Ask God for blessings on them for what they will face that day, thanks for the good you can see from the marriage in the past 24 hours, etc. I wanted to remind Katlyn that one of the purposes of marriage is to help the other spouse get to heaven. And you are each on for that.

In our Gospel today Jesus is speaking to His Apostles at the Last Supper. He tells them, “I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself. So that where I am you also may be.” Jesus wants us to be with Him in Heaven – and right now. He wants that so much He died for it. Love is a commitment to work for the other person’s

good because a life with that person – including the suffering that will always go with such a commitment – is better than a life without them. Jesus showed us this way by His own death for each of us on the cross. Giving and receiving that love is why we were created.

As with individuals, so with parishes. Sacred Heart exists to facilitate that self-gift of ourselves to God and neighbor. Day-to-day parish life, just as in your marriages, can easily lead to forgetting that MAIN POINT. And so we can settle for so little, including in our relationship with God – and then wonder why we're dissatisfied.

So – I'll make what might seem like a strange pivot. Today I'm going to preach about the Annual Catholic Appeal. The appeal funds the larger Church's mission in ways that individual parishes can't organize or afford. But rather than talk about all the ways the ACA helps fund the Archdiocesan programs (and it does), I want to talk about a decision I've made regarding what will happen once we've reached our goal of \$188,000, hoping to underline our first priority.

The money raised over our goal comes back to us. And the parish office wing needs a new roof. We can all understand that need. But the roof isn't the top priority of Sacred Heart parish. Sacred Heart exists as the place and community in which we are each to meet and love Jesus. We must remember that. So, the first \$55,000 we get back this year will go to something even more fundamental than keeping the rain out.

Coming back to Katlyn. For the past two years she has been a FOCUS missionary at Arizona State University. (FOCUS stands for "Fellowship of Catholic University Students"). Some of you helped her when she asked for financial support at Sacred Heart a couple of years ago.

How has she spent the past two years? (Well, falling in love with one of her fellow missionaries, but that's another story). FOCUS missionaries live near the campus and seek to connect with the students – inviting them to Bible studies they lead – and other small

groups. They offer conferences and run mission trips in the summers and generally mentor the students by walking alongside them. They follow Christ's model of face-to-face evangelization to build up the students' personal relationships with Jesus. The goal is for those students to get a personal knowledge of Christ, so they can eventually go out themselves and invite others in.

I mention FOCUS because they have a new initiative – “Parish-FOCUS.” The model here is to take some of the older FOCUS missionaries (late 20s – early 30s) who have had a few years' experience on campus and put them into parishes – to do basically the same ministry here.

I have contacted FOCUS and asked to participate in Parish-FOCUS. They have agreed. That means FOCUS will begin to recruit two lay missionaries to come to our parish family, beginning in the summer of 2027. For our part, we have agreed to commit to donating \$55,000 per missionary per year for at least three years.

Sacred Heart and St. Monica will each come up with \$55,000 so we can have two missionaries – the ideal situation according to FOCUS. That's what the first \$55,000 from our excess contributions will go towards. Anything over that amount will then go to the roof, etc. Roofs are important, but spreading the Gospel is even more important. It's the reason why the roof and the parish exist.

Coming back to my advice to Katlyn – five minutes of prayer every day for her husband. It's so easy to forget your love. You're so busy shopping, getting kids to their events, coordinating work schedules that pretty soon you don't know each other's lives well enough to pray for one another for even five minutes! It's just as easy to forget Jesus when we're trying to deal with life's daily challenges.

If you find it difficult to find enough to pray for your spouse for 300 whole seconds – then you have lost track of your spouse. You don't know him/her well enough. Your marriage is on autopilot. Get back to the basics.

Similarly, do we know Jesus well enough to want to spend 5 (or 20) minutes a day with Him? That is why I chose to invite and invest in Focus, to help us all remember and renew our focus on that most important Person of all, Jesus. That is why we're here. And, despite all her sins and foibles, that is why Jesus founded this Church. Please support her again in this year's ACA campaign.