



smyrna, Tennessee

St. Patrick's

Anglican Church

An Ancient Faith for Modern Times

Letters from the Wilderness **#3**

Dear Saints,

Once the children of Israel entered the wilderness, and after celebrating their freedom, the practical aspects of life settled in. Most importantly, how would they be sustained for the journey? To meet this need the LORD sent manna to feed them (Exodus 16). This bread from heaven was God's continual provision until they entered the Promised Land and were able to grow crops for themselves.

St. Patrick's, having begun our own journey through the wilderness, has also received manna to sustain us. Only our manna has come in several different forms and so we will not tire of it as easily as the Israelites did. Thank God for a manna variety pack!

First has been the ongoing support from unexpected places. One deacon in Chicago read of our decision and drove throughout the night to worship with us at Smyrna Assembly. He didn't want recognition or attention he simply wanted to show his support. A Baptist family sent us an offering toward our general

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fund to show agreement with our direction. A local copy company (Copy Pack and Mail) said that they wanted to donate all of the bulletins for all of our services in December, including the Christmas Masses, because we have taken the right stand. My barber offered for us to meet in his barber shop on Sundays. A man I had never met called to say that he was thrilled with the stand that St. Patrick's had made and that he used us as an example to his children that following Christ is not always easy. He stated further that he and his Sunday School were praying for us, loved us and looked forward to seeing how God would use us. A Nashville businessman called to promise to contribute money when we begin construction of a new church. A Murfreesboro businessman offered to cosign for us when it comes time to purchase our own place. All of this has come to us *unsolicited*, as signs of God's provision and these different forms of encouragement are food for the soul to sustain us on the journey.

Another form of manna has been the outpouring of love towards the Burmese Community. It would have been very easy for the members of St. Patrick's to become self absorbed by our losses and new challenges but instead we focused on the needs of others. So many gifts were donated to children and adults alike that it took over an hour for the Burmese leaders to distribute the "manna" on Christmas Eve. For these folks who have so little it was a supernatural provision that was joyfully received. Like the children of Israel, we shared our manna with those who are among us, and were blessed to do so.

Third, manna from heaven has also come to us in the form of the new faces who are showing up and old friends that have returned. I received this email from a new couple. *"In a day of 'political correctness' and watered down faith; it is so refreshing to see men and women of God who are willing to take a stand for what is right. Your courage and faith has inspired me and my husband to follow. We are so excited to be a part of what God is going to do*

through St. Patrick's in the New Year." It is meat and drink to be with people who join us in the joys and challenges of our new beginnings. No one could doubt that these new friends and the old ones returning are God's provision.

Lastly, and most importantly, we continue to meet weekly for the Sacrament because it is the Body and Blood of Jesus that is God's ultimate manna. Every catholic Christian holds the Eucharist as central to their spiritual life, just as food is essential for the body. But the Bread of Heaven becomes even more important while we are in the wilderness, and I have not doubt that together we will develop a new appreciation for this sacred meal. Unlike for many, it is not an historic gothic building that draws us or Tiffany windows and it certainly is not a convenient time of day that brings us together. What draws us to be with one another is meeting Jesus through Word and Sacrament. I read of a group of POW's during Vietnam that were finally allowed to see one another after years of solitary confinement and the first thing they did was worship, putting together a Eucharist as best they could. These men, in going straight for the essentials, truly understood the gift God had given them.

We will learn many lessons together on our journey. God has already demonstrated that He can set a table in the wilderness so there is nothing to fear and we can face this new year with confidence and hope. Will someone please pass me the manna?

Fr. Ray +