



SSS Grapevine

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Father Thomas Smithson SSS Appreciated for Years of Service at Corpus Christi Parish in Houston, Texas

By Greg Dufour, Associate of the Blessed Sacrament



On Saturday, January 27, 2024, the Corpus Christi parish community (Houston, Texas) celebrated Father Thomas Smithson SSS and thanked him for his 10 ½ of devoted service to our parish. (Father Tom is the longest-serving SSS pastor and second longest pastor of our parish, second only to the founding pastor, Msgr. Cornelius Flynn, who served 20 years.) The evening's festivities began with Father Tom presiding at the 5:00 PM Vigil Mass, joined by Father Paul Raj Gnanasekar (Sekar) SSS and Deacon William Castro. Over 300 people attended the Mass.

After Mass, the community held a delightful potluck dinner in the parish hall. The parish's various ministries put on an unforgettable evening for everyone. The potluck featured an abundance of food and drink, with a wide variety of dishes that represented the diverse international community of the parish. It was an "agape feast" that genuinely reflected the spirit of the community.



The potluck dinner began with the blessing of the food by Father Tom. More than 375 people attended the dinner, including former school principals, parish staff, and former parishioners who traveled long distances to be there. The children had a great time running around and enjoying the food with their friends and family. It was beautiful to see even a 101-year-old parishioner attend this special evening.

At the beginning of the evening, 40 children from Corpus Christi Catholic School delighted the audience with an endearing and entertaining rendition of the song "You've Got a Friend in Me." The students and their parents were thrilled to participate in honoring Father Tom. Ms. Julie Boneau, the Music and Art teacher, chose this song because "it embodies Catholic values that Father Tom has often spoken about to the children, such as the significance of kindness, community, and friendship."



Members of the Hispanic choir honored Father Tom by singing touching versions of "Quiero Ofrecerte" (*I Want to Offer You*) and "Unction Divina" (*Divine Anointing*). The beautiful lyrics reflect the love, care, and compassion with which Father Tom has served the parish community. A slideshow was shown throughout the evening, set to music; it was a touching tribute for everyone present.

Father Sekar, our new pastor, shared beautiful words of thanks and appreciation for Father Tom's years of service to the parish and his unwavering dedication to the growth and success of the school. He mentioned how he has willingly given of himself in so many ways. One example is Father Tom's care and compassion



towards the houseless and those in need who come ringing the rectory doorbell asking for assistance. Father Sekar thanked him for his remarkable leadership in overseeing the completion of the renovations in the church, especially given the delays and the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Father Tom's selfless and caring nature has made a lasting impression on the community. It saddened everyone when he announced that he would no longer serve as pastor. However, he quickly explained that he would continue his service in hospital ministry within Houston's Catholic Chaplain Corp, serving at Women's Hospital and HCA Hospital nearby. Hearing this brought joy to the community, as they knew they would still have him around. Although they will miss him as their pastor, they are excited to see how he will continue to impact the lives of everyone he meets in his new ministry.

Pastoral Visit to Houston, Texas

SSS Indian Father Gnanasekar Becomes 8th Pastor of Corpus Christi Parish

By John Thomas Lane SSS



On January 1, 2024, Blessed Sacrament Father Paul Raj Gnanasekar (*commonly known as Father Sekar*) from the Indian Province of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament became the third international priest to serve in a Saint Ann Province (USA) parish as pastor. On Saturday, February 3, 2024, Father Sekar liturgically became the eighth pastor in a special installation rite at Corpus Christi Roman Catholic Church, Houston, Texas.

The installation rite began with a special gathering the night before, Friday, February 2, with the Associates of the Blessed hosting a reception in the parish rectory. As usual, our Associates have the best foods with recipes from around the world. Our Associates hail from so many ethnic backgrounds in this parish, which adds to the richness of our community. And, in case you were wondering, there were also many amazing desserts that had been blessed to be calorie-free.

Representing the Cardinal-Archbishop Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, who was out of town, Episcopal Vicar (for the region of the archdiocese that our parish is in), the Very

Reverend Lawrence Jozwiak, JCL, began the Mass with a ritual. This author, on behalf of Father D. Peter Jayakanthan, SSS, provincial of our Indian province, presented Father Sekar to the cardinal's representative, Father Lawrence, and the people of Corpus Christi. Father Sekar also had his new Pastoral Staff, School Faculty and Staff, Pastoral Council, Finance Council, and other ministries present to hear him pledge his service and need for their collaboration. *(Previously, Father Sekar served in India as pastor, provincial, novice director, and in other ministries in his almost 32 years of being an SSS priest.)*



Father Lawrence then gave an eight-minute reflection on the duties of a pastor and encouraged Father Sekar to share his many gifts and talents with the parish. I was invited to give the homily and focused on the unique gifts that an SSS parish witnesses and how Father Sekar and the parish have this chance to improve upon the great traditions in this almost 70-year-old parish in a beautifully newly renovated worship space. After the homily, Fathers Lawrence and Sekar signed a special oath of faithfulness that was presented to the parish with the archdiocesan seal.



Following the Saturday vigil installation Mass, everyone enjoyed a light reception hosted by



Reverend James Burkart and me

the Catholic Women’s ministry in the parish hall, named after the 4th pastor, Father Roger Prefontaine. The first two pastors of Corpus Christi were diocesan priests, serving twenty-five years. Archbishop Joseph Fiorenza invited the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament to administer the parish in 1987. Fathers Roland LaLiberté, Roger Prefontaine, John Thomas Lane, Dana Pelotte, and Thomas Smithson served during this time.

Additionally, during my time in Houston, I met with Reverend James Burkart, a life-long friend who will lead the Saint Ann Triduum, July 24 – 26, 2024, at Saint Paschal Baylon, Highland Heights, Ohio. We met to begin the

planning for this event. Father James is known for his great homilies and excellent pilgrimages, having just led one to the holy sites of Canada, including Saint Ann’s shrine in Quebec. There is also a new vicar for clergy in the archdiocese, so I met with the Very Reverend Clark Sample to discuss our current and future ministries. He, too, has known of our SSS charism and our community members over the years. He is delighted that we have two religious hospital chaplains, Fathers Tom Smithson (USA) and Christian Christopher (Sir Lanka), ministering so



Anthony Hyginus

well in the medical center of downtown Houston. Finally, as I do on most of my pastoral trips, I met with a vocation candidate, a lay hospital chaplain named Anthony Hyginus, who lives nearby and was recommended to “come and see” our religious life by his spiritual director, another hospital chaplain “Father Jo Jo,” who knows our religious community well.



1The Hispanic Choir

The weekend went by quickly with preaching at every Mass, having an SSS community meeting with our four men in

Houston (including the doctoral student Father Joseph Doan), and enjoying a brief relaxation time with our parishioners and community friends. I am grateful for our Associates’ hospitality and care as always and for the touching kindness to this former pastor of our incredible international parish in Houston - living so what they receive, the Body of Christ, Corpus Christi.

Celebrating Candlemas at Saint Vincent de Paul in Holiday, Florida

by Laura Worhacz, Associate of the Blessed Sacrament



Truly a communion of grace to bring forth the 2024 CANDLEMAS DINNER DANCE. Close to 200 people gathered in Father Farrell Hall on Saturday evening to celebrate The Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple and Saint Peter Julian Eymard's birthday & baptism. The Mothers of the Blessed Sacrament have organized this event for several years. It is the mothers' annual gathering and a beautiful family observance. The gift of living in a pattern of prayer in our church to keep sacred traditions alive is essential for the life of our CHURCH.

Many thanks go out to all who attended and contributed to bringing a memorable evening to celebrate CANDLEMAS to fruition.



Chef Mark did an excellent job cooking by donating corn dogs and French fries for the kids who made supper grand. Thank you, Knights of Columbus. Decorating was possible with Dina, Marissa, and Sylvia Schiereck. Theresa and Dimitre Bobev donated beautiful trays of antipasto. Vincent Mattola did a great job with the music playlist to keep everyone, mostly the children, dancing. Many thanks go out to the donors who made it possible for some families and people who could not attend due to cost. A special thank you to Suzann Corral,

treasurer for the Mothers of the Blessed Sacrament, for all of the collection on PayPal, and for preparing a beautiful invitation for us.

Thank you to Father William Fickel SSS, Spiritual Advisor for the Mothers of the Blessed Sacrament, whose support has guided the mothers' cenacle in the past eight years. Thank you to our Pastor, Father Dominic Long SSS, for beautifying Father Farrell Hall and Father Joselito Hitois SSS, for being present with Father Matteo Rizzo. Our Priests are precious to us. Grateful!

