

“Many signs and wonders were done among the people at the hands of the apostles.”

This is the first line of today’s first reading; and then the reading goes on to speak about the huge crowds that gathered around Peter and the apostles at Solomon’s portico right outside the Temple, and about all the sick and those disturbed by unclean spirits that were cured by just having Peter’s shadow fall upon them. Peter of course knew who it was that accomplished the cures: and it wasn’t him; it wasn’t Peter; it was the risen Lord.

What we often fail to realize is that the risen Lord *still* has the same power. The risen Lord can make the same cures happen today, and cause the same wonder. And sometimes, all we have to do is ask.

About a year and a half ago, our parish Justice and Peace Commission – in an attempt to expand their agenda – was discussing what some of the greatest needs and conflicts and challenges are in the world today. And they immediately came up with the challenges facing the family in America today. Early on our parish Pastoral Care Commission was invited into the discussion, and together they decided to try to do something to support and strengthen family life, especially here in our parish. Today’s family blessing is a first step. And we invite other ideas, so if you think of things the parish might do to help you as a family member live the gospel values, please let us know.

When you think about it, is there anything more difficult than parenting today? How do parents lead and guide their children so they develop a sense of self-worth, appreciate their own personal skills and talents, and learn to live in a world that can be very hostile? How do they make sure they're being strict enough, but not too strict? and lenient enough without letting their children raise themselves? How can they give their children the kind of love they need – true love – so their children grow to be loving persons, knowing what it is to be loved, and what it is to love?

Fr. Bill Bausch, in one of his books, talks about three pillars of American culture, which make it especially challenging for families. The first pillar is **materialism**. Materialism has become so powerful a source of our identity that kids literally kill other kids for their Reeboks or for the latest “in” jacket. We've all heard the stories. Materialism is the American symbol of success. It's a hallmark of our culture.

The second pillar of our culture is **consumerism**. The hundreds of commercials we see on TV every day – tens of thousands each year – they all tell us what we need to buy and what we need to have in order to be “with it” in today's world. And treating people like things – things to be “consumed” – is taken for granted. Several years ago Mike Royko wrote: “Sometimes I flip through the cable channels, pausing few seconds at the major ones. Flip – there's somebody being shot or blown up. Flip – there's a couple of people stripping and hopping in bed. Flip – there's a couple of people in bed being shot or blown up. Flip – what a relief. It's a standup comedian. But what's that he's saying?

The old ‘F’ word? Not once, not twice. Goodness, doesn’t he know any other words?” That’s what’s being sold to us virtually all the time. That’s what families and all of us are being subjected to constantly.

The third pillar of our culture is **individualism**. Fr. Bausch says: “This is the attitude that the world revolves around me. I’m the center of the universe. Everybody’s here to serve me. I do my thing: run through spouses, children, jobs, relationships. They’re all temporary. I’m the one who counts.”

Kathy and Mitch Finley, Catholic authors and speakers, critique our culture; they say: “A culture’s not something we can simply step aside from, or take off and put on, like a hat. A culture’s more like something we inhabit, as a fish swims in the sea. In the dominant culture of the U.S. it’s taken for granted, among other things, that money and material possessions are the ultimate form of security and are central to one’s values as a person; that violent means are an acceptable way to solve one’s problems; that individualism and being self-sufficient are preferable to communal relationships; that *doing* – being productive – is more important than *being*; that shopping is the number one form of recreation.”

In the face of all this, we need the presence and the power of the risen Lord in our lives more than ever. And that’s the point of the family blessing today: to call down the Lord’s power and strength to help our families live the gospel values, in the midst of all the

challenges in our American culture. We all came from a family, and we're all part of a family – whether we live alone or with others, so we have a variety of blessings to include everyone. As I announce each specific blessing, you are asked to stand and remain in your place to receive the blessing. Many of you will stand more than once, and that's fine. There's no limit to the number of blessings we can receive. And there'll be copies of these blessings in the Parish Center after mass. We encourage you to pick one up and continue using these blessings within your own family at home.