

Old St. Joseph's Church

Est. 1733 | Philadelphia's Jesuit Parish

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December 9, 2018 | Second Sunday of Advent

An Encounter with Jesus Christ

The law of supply and demand is one of the most basic principles of economics. An ample supply reduces the price because the item is plentiful. On the other hand, when the supply is limited and an item is scarce, the price goes up. If you want to increase the price of gasoline, just get Saudi Arabia to cut back on production for a week or two. It's the way things work.

I've never heard anyone invoke the law of supply and demand in Catholic theology. But in fact many people act as if the law applies even in religion, and specifically, with regard to forgiveness. The thinking goes like this: If forgiveness becomes too readily available, more plentiful, then the value of forgiveness will go down. People will just take it for granted. So it's best to limit the supply and make forgiveness hard to get. That will make people value it more and not take it for granted. Furthermore, if forgiveness is kept in short supply, people will be less prone to commit sins because they will know how hard it is to get back in God's good graces.

What do you think of this idea? It's exactly one of the main arguments Jesus' opponents used against him in the Gospels. As you know, Jesus is very easy on sinners and that got him in a lot of trouble. Too easy, as far as his opponents were concerned. They strongly objected when Jesus let someone off with "Go and sin no more" whom they thought should be condemned to hellfire.

Ironically, in the history of the Church, the practice

of Christians at times sided more with Jesus' opponents than with Jesus himself, adopting the law of supply and demand. For centuries the Church made it exceedingly difficult for sinners to be forgiven in what we today call the sacrament of reconciliation. Granted, they were talking about really serious sins. But years of severe penances and public humiliation were required before you could merit forgiveness – and that was your one and only chance in your lifetime to utilize the sacrament. If you sinned again, you had no further recourse. In the early Church, forgiveness was made deliberately hard to get. You had to earn it.



Sadly, the notion that you have to earn forgiveness opened up a lot of abuses, like the selling of indulgences, which was the big scandal that led to the Protestant Reformation. It was thought you could get the soul of a loved one out of purgatory if you were willing to pay for it. Preaching about God's infinite mercy and gratuitous love would have had a depressing effect on business.

Fortunately, the sacrament of reconciliation was gradually reformed. Forgiveness became a lot more available, but still it wasn't cost-free. Instead of severe penances or payment of money, forgiveness was

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tied to confession. You had to appear before a judge, in the person of the priest, and secretly confess your sins, precisely recounting their nature and frequency so that an appropriate penalty could be affixed. This juridical model insured the price of forgiveness would be kept relatively high, though to be honest it wasn't too high a price to pay for something as valuable as forgiveness.

Unfortunately, the market changed rather abruptly. People apparently decided that confessing their sins was too unpleasant or inconvenient, so relatively few people availed themselves of sacramental absolution. Some felt the personal embarrassment of confessing was too great a price. Others didn't know what they were supposed to say in confession. They didn't know exactly what their sins were, unlike in former days when the rules were clear and sins were simple infractions. So people looked to other places to find forgiveness or simply ignored the whole need for forgiveness. The traditional Catholic teaching about sin and guilt and going to confession became largely the butt of jokes and mockery in our popular culture.

So that's where we are. And it's not a good place to be.

That God is merciful and offers his forgiveness is a central tenet of our faith and a critically important grace that the world desperately needs. All the sacraments rely on God's merciful love, but one in particular specifically celebrates this reality of grace. We need to recover this sacrament of reconciliation and restore it to our religious lives. But we can't do that simply by trying to restore past practice or by appealing to some distorted attitudes.

What does our faith tell us about God's mercy and forgiveness?

First, God's forgiveness isn't cheap. It cost dearly. It had to be earned—but not by us. It is rooted in the paschal mystery, which is centered on the sacrificial offering Jesus made of himself and the Father's response in raising Jesus from the dead.

Second, we can't earn God's forgiveness. It is a gift from God, freely offered. Confessing our sins or doing penances does not merit forgiveness. God forgives our sins because God's nature is to forgive, not because of what we do.



Third, our sins are not just breaking rules, but failing to love. That's why confessing our sins is not the same thing as reciting the proverbial "laundry list" of infractions. Of course, the rules are meant to point us in the right direction, so we should follow them. But as Scripture

frequently reminds us, if you follow all the rules but do not have love, you've missed the whole point.

Fourth, our task is to open ourselves to God's love and receive his freely offered forgiveness. That's not some liberal watering down or weaseling out of our responsibility. It means renewing our commitment to follow Jesus as a disciple and reforming our lives under the impetus of God's grace.

So the way we celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation as a celebration of God's forgiveness should express what we really believe. In other words, the old style of whispering your sins in a dark corner behind a screen, all by yourself, reciting an act of contrition by rote (if you could remember it under pressure) and getting on your way is not the outward sign of what the mystery of redemption is all about.

Immediately after the Second Vatican Council, in the early 1970's, the Church tried to change the way we celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. It was an effort to make the ritual more expressive of the mystery of God's forgiveness and God's action in forgiving us. But unfortunately, people have not embraced this reformed ritual. So you still hear Catholics talking about "going to confession" with all the emphasis on what they are to say to the priest and little reference to the encounter with Jesus in the

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sacrament or what God has done for us. It's all about misplaced emphasis.

So on this Tuesday evening, December 11, we will celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation at Old St. Joseph. We will come together as a community, pray together, hear the Scriptures once again that proclaim what God has done for us, open our hearts to encounter Jesus our Redeemer and express our sorrow for our sins. Part of this time together will include, for those who wish, an opportunity to come before a priest, confessing and acknowledging our sinfulness. And then the priest will raise his hand over you and say

*God, the Father of mercies,
Through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus,
Has reconciled the world to himself
And sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of our sins.
So through the ministry of the Church
May God grant you pardon and peace.
And I absolve you of your sins,
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

—Father Walter Modrys SJ
Pastor

Both images are by Rembrandt van Rijn and both are titled The Return of the Prodigal Son. The first is a painting, c. 1668; the second is an etching, 1636. Both images are in the public domain and found on commons.wikimedia.org.

Advent Giving Tree

Take an ornament-tag from OSJ's Advent Giving Tree this weekend, **December 8-9**, and follow the directions on it to provide a holiday gift to a neighbor in need. Unwrapped gifts must be returned to the foot of the tree by **December 16**.

This year, the Advent Giving Tree benefits the Gesu School and the Aquinas Center. If you are interested in becoming more involved with either organization, visit their websites: gesuschool.org/join_our_mission and aquinascenterphilly.org/get-involved.

Advent Reconciliation Service

On **Tuesday, December 11 at 7:30 PM**, there will be an **Advent Reconciliation Service** in the Church. The service is a time to listen to the Word of God, reflect, and pray together for God's mercy. Opportunity to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation individually will be available. All are welcome!

Lessons and Carols, Next Sunday, December 16

Next Sunday, **December 16 at 3:00 PM** our parish clergy, choir, and lectors will present a Service of Lessons and Carols. This liturgy foretells Christ's coming in sacred scripture and in song, proclaimed to rouse our spirits in preparation for Christ's coming this Christmastide. In addition to festive Advent and Christmas carols for congregational singing, choral music will include works by Praetorius, Mathias, and Rutter, and organ works by Bach and Brahms. A free will offering will be gratefully accepted and a reception will follow in Barbelin Hall.

This Week at Old St. Joseph's

Date		Mass Intention and Presider	Calendar Events	
Mon	12:05 PM	<i>Old St. Joseph's Memorial Society</i>	6:00 PM	PREP
10		Presider: Fr. Dougherty SJ	6:00 PM	Mass for PREP Grades 2, 3, 4 (Church)
Tues	12:05 PM	<i>Old St. Joseph's Memorial Society</i>	12 Noon	Faith, Food, and Friends (Barbelin)
11		Presider: Fr. Modrys SJ	7:30PM	Advent Reconciliation Service
Wed	12:05 PM	<i>Edward & Mary Britt Families (D)</i>	6:30 PM	Centering Prayer (Drexel)
12		Presider: Fr. Dougherty SJ		
Thurs	12:05 PM	<i>Geraldine Marren & Family (D)</i>	12 Noon	Faith, Food, and Friends (Barbelin)
13		Presider: Fr. O'Donnell SJ	7:00 PM	Schola Cantorum Rehearsal
Fri	12:05 PM	<i>Benefactors of the Maryland Province</i>	5:30 PM	Young Adult Community Happy Hour
14		Presider: Fr. Dougherty SJ		(off-site)
Sat		<i>Thomas Woods (D)</i>	12 Noon	Faith, Food, and Friends (Barbelin)
15	12:05 PM	Presider: Fr. O'Donnell SJ		
	5:30 PM	Presider: Fr. Dougherty SJ		
Sun	7:30 AM	Presider: Fr. O'Donnell SJ		
16	9:30 AM	Presider: Fr. Modrys SJ	9:30 AM	Children's Liturgy of the Word (Barbelin)
	11:30 AM	Presider: Fr. Modrys SJ	3:00 PM	Advent Lessons and Carols
	6:30 PM	Presider: Fr. Modrys SJ	5:30 PM	Loyola Choir Rehearsal (Church)
			5:30 PM	YAC Pre-Mass Reflection (Greaton)

In your prayers,
please remember our sick and homebound brothers and sisters
and our ministry at Pennsylvania Hospital.

Adeline Acerno, Teresa Aponte, Louis Balestrucci, Rick Bravo, Debbie Brooks, Christopher Browne, Tony Corvaia, Melissa Counsellor, Charlotte Croce, Ann Crowther, Simeon Crowther, Fred DiStefano, Pat Farris, Lenny Felixson, Fred Hembree, Fr. Mike Hricko SJ, Aaron Hull, Edward Jacobs, Marie Jacobs, Mary Jacobs, Janet Jeitner, Tamae Kan, Catherine Keddie, David Luerssen, Fr. Jerry McAndrews SJ, James McBride, Jerry McBride, Christine Mari-Mazzola, Allen May, Angelo Miczza, D. Minter, Catherine O'Brien, Bernie Paquett, Joanna Pearl, Lucy Pearl, Betty Farris Pfeiffer, Colleen Raymond, Kim Reed, Ursula Reed, Joan Russo, Steve Saunders, Barbara Schmidt, Mida Skalamera, Sara Smith, Janet Street, Ed Tomezsko, Arlene Tomlin, Craig Walsh, Patricia Yusko, Mickey Zippo.

Bringing Communion to the Homebound

When people are confined to home, they can remain connected to our shared worship by receiving Communion at home. If you, a family member, friend or neighbor (with their approval of course), would like to receive Communion at home, contact the Parish Rectory to arrange for a parish Eucharistic Minister to visit.

Announcements

Centering Prayer Next Week

The Centering Prayer group will meet on **Wednesday, December 12, 6:30 to 8:30 PM** in the Drexel Parlor of the rectory. All who are interested in contemplative prayer are welcome.

Special Tour of Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul

Please join the OSJ Eldership Community for a special tour of the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul on **Thursday, December 13 at 11:00 AM**. A suggested offering of \$2/person is appreciated. Tour will be followed by lunch at a nearby restaurant. RSVP by **Tuesday December 11** to jamesmoore2030@comcast.net.

Young Adult Community Happy Hour

It's only 11 more sleeps 'til Christmas, so it's time to deck the halls and celebrate together at the December Happy Hour! All Young Adults are invited to **Moriarty's Irish Pub (1116 Walnut St) starting at 5:30 PM on Friday, December 14.** Their Christmas decorations has landed them on Uwishunu's list of "Most Festive Restaurants and Bars in Philly!" Come out and celebrate the most wonderful time of the year with YAC! Contact Colleen O'Neil (coneil0909@gmail.com, 440-552-3838) with any questions or to find us at the bar. Hope to see you there!

Warmth, Beauty, and Doing Good

OSJ's Eldership Community is raffling off two cozy and beautiful afghans handcrafted by their very own knitters. Tickets are \$2.00 each or \$5.00 for three chances and will be available at Sunday Coffee Hours until winners are drawn after Lessons and Carols on December 16. Proceeds will benefit OSJ's Faith, Food, and Friends outreach program.

Requiescat in Pace

Longstanding Old St. Joseph's parishioner **Eileen Gallagher** passed away on Friday, November 23, 2018. Eileen's Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at Old St. Joseph's Church November 30. Please keep Eileen's family and friends in your thoughts and prayers. Donations in Eileen's memory may be made to OSJ's Historic Preservation Corporation (OSJHPC).

Old St. Joseph's parishioner **Mark Bojanowski** passed away on Friday, November 28, 2018. Mark's Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at Old St. Joseph's Church on December 4. Please keep Mark's friends in your thoughts and prayers.

Online Giving

The following collections are now active on the online giving website:

Retired Religious Fund, through December 16
Immaculate Conception, through December 23
Christmas Flowers, through December 30
Christmas Music, through December 30
Christmas Collection, through January 13
Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, through January 13.

Christmas at Old St. Joseph's

Mass on Christmas Eve
4:00 PM, 6:30 PM and 9:00 PM
with prelude music beginning at 8:40 PM

Mass on Christmas Day
10:00 AM *only*

New Year's Day
12:05 PM

INFORMATION

Rectory Office Hours

Monday through Friday: 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM
Sunday: 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM

Mass Times

Monday through Saturday: 12:05 PM
Saturday Vigil Mass for Sunday: 5:30 PM
Sunday: 7:30, 9:30, 11:30 AM and 6:30 PM
Holy Days: 12:05 and 7:30 PM

Medical Emergency

In the event of a medical emergency when the need for a priest is urgent, please call the rectory.

Hearing Enhancements

Old St. Joseph's is equipped with an audio hearing loop. Switch on the T-coil function of your device to use the loop. Booklets with the Sunday readings are in the rear of the church.

Registration

Persons who want to register as parishioners should complete a parish registration form and return it to the rectory office by mail or in person. Registration forms are available in the rectory office during normal office hours, on the bookcases in the back of the church and online at www.oldstjoseph.org.

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Monday through Saturday: 11:30 AM to noon or by appointment

Sacrament of Baptism

Persons wanting to arrange for a baptism should call Fr. Dougherty at the parish office at least two months before the desired date to arrange catechesis and the baptism celebration.

The Sacrament of Anointing

The Sacrament of Anointing (the sacrament of the sick) is administered during the 12:05 PM Mass on the first Saturday of each month. Homebound or hospitalized persons wanting to receive the Sacrament of Anointing should call the parish office.

Sacrament of Matrimony

Persons wanting to be married in the parish should call Fr. O'Donnell at the parish office at least nine months before the desired date.

Rite of Christian Initiation

Unbaptized adults who are considering baptism into the Catholic Church, baptized Catholics who have received no other sacraments and who want to be confirmed and to receive First Eucharist, and baptized non-Catholics who are considering full communion in the Catholic Church should call Fr. O'Donnell at the parish office.

To arrange Mass of Christian Burial

The funeral director should call the parish office.

Pastor

Fr. Walter Modrys SJ (pastor@oldstjoseph.org)

Parochial Vicar

Fr. Edward O'Donnell SJ (eodonnell@oldstjoseph.org)

In Residence

Br. Robert Carson SJ

Fr. Edward Dougherty SJ (dougherty@oldstjoseph.org)

Pastoral Associate

BJ Brown (bjbrown@oldstjoseph.org)

Business Manager

Eric German (germane@oldstjoseph.org)

Director of Music

Mark Bani (music@oldstjoseph.org)

Parish Offices

(office@oldstjoseph.org)

PREP Coordinator

Christine Szczepanowski (prep@oldstjoseph.org)

Faith, Food & Friends Director

Deborah Hluchan (faithandfriends@oldstjoseph.org)

Parish Pastoral Council

Rana McNamara and Richard Le, co-chairs
(osjpc@oldstjoseph.org)

Parish Finance Council

Paul Shay, chair

Historic Preservation Corporation Board

Fr. Walter Modrys SJ, president.

Adult Education

Rita O'Brien and Jeanmarie Zippo
(adulted@oldstjoseph.org)

Eldership

Joan Slavin (joanslavin@aol.com)

Parish Life

Joe Casey (joetcasey@aol.com)

Ignatian Spirituality and Formation

John Bitterman (osjspirituality@oldstjoseph.org)

Women, Faith and Fellowship

Rana McNamara (wff@oldstjoseph.org)

Young Adult Community

Jenn Lydic and Megan Prilutski (osjyac@gmail.com)

Altar Servers

Maria Ramirez (mathra71@yahoo.com)

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

Bill Stewart (wstewart@kaplaw.com)

Hospital Ministry

Luanne Balestrucci (lbalestrucci@yahoo.com)

Homebound Ministry

Neal Hébert (neal9536@gmail.com)

Lectors

Lou Anne Bulik (labulik@yahoo.com)

Ushers

Nikola Sizgorich (niksiz@icloud.com)

Children's Liturgy of the Word

Peggy Connolly (pmcon@comcast.net)