

# FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

## LOOK UP AND NOT DOWN....

I suppose that most of us here on Staten Island have been stuck in backed up traffic from time to time. It's a rather regular occurrence - not only here but all over the city. It seems that there is no time when there is not some "bottle neck" and congestion on our aging roads and highways.

The other day, driving to the hospital, I was stuck in some really bad backed up traffic on Hylan Boulevard. Being somewhat exasperated, I picked up my cell phone to see if I had any messages. As I was looking down at the phone, suddenly I was jolted by the "beep" of a bus driver's horn right across the lane from me. I glanced over and the bus driver pointed to a sign on the city bus which read, "look up-not down!" He smiled and put his hands together in the praying position! I smiled back and put the phone down.

It was a timely and necessary reminder to me to pay attention to driving instead of the I-phone! I suppose that many of us are distracted today by our cell phones. Certainly, it is a great invention and has made life a lot easier. However, it has also resulted in a lot of distraction and loss of focus in our daily lives.

A man I know told me that recently he was at a restaurant with family members, and most of the young people there were not talking with each other but rather were absorbed with their phones. Of course, we know that cell phones regularly go off in church even at the most important parts of the Mass with some unique ringtones. And if the kids get bored during the homilies, at least they can look at their phones!

But perhaps too much "phone gazing" is not good. It can dull our minds and hearts so that we sort of forget about God and spiritual realities which is not good. At Sunday Mass, something truly great happens - Jesus Christ becomes present at the altar and we should pay attention!

Last week at the Vatican, Pope Francis gave an interesting speech. He told the people in St. Peter's Square that they must receive Holy Communion every time as if it were their very first Communion. The Pope described the Eucharist as a "stupendous gift of the Lord" which should not be received in a passive or mechanical way. The Holy Father said this about Communion: "It is Jesus. It is Jesus who saved me; it is Jesus who comes to give me the strength to live."

Just think of the enthusiasm that the children have who make their First Holy Communion. They are so happy and excited! I wonder if there was some way we could bottle that child-like spirit! Many of us, priests included, can become a little dull and "worn down" in our appreciation of the faith and the sacraments.

About a year ago, I mentioned in a homily that I had seen a sign in a church sacristy that read this way: "Oh priest of God, say this Mass like your first Mass, your last Mass, your only Mass!" A wonderful parishioner made me a sign with that saying on it, and we have it displayed here at St. Charles as a timely reminder not to take the holy sacrifice of the Mass for granted.

As we begin the summer months, let's take some "time out" to strengthen our faith and to focus on what is most important in life which is our soul and our relationship to Jesus Christ. Let's start looking up more often and not down! God love you!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. Jerome