



Shepherding the Spirit



Where have you seen God move in your life through the power of the Holy Spirit? Where are you seeing God moving in your life now? Where might you see God move in your life in the future?

These are just some of the questions pondered during the most recent BELIEVES session on Tuesday, April 12th when Monsignor Frank McNamee, pastor at the Cathedral of Christ the King, led a discussion on “Shepherding the Spirit.”

“Each morning, one prayer I start off with is the prayer to the Holy Spirit,” said Monsignor McNamee.

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.
And kindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.
And you will renew the face of the earth.*

*Lord,
by the light of the Holy Spirit
you have taught the hearts of your faithful.
In the same Spirit
help us to relish what is right
and always rejoice in your consolation.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

“Pope Francis tells us prayer is memory. If we reflect on God’s Holy Spirit in our loves – good and bad – we have a plan, and God has a plan.”

To illustrate, Monsignor McNamee chose to begin sharing a bit from his life.

“When I entered into seminary, if you had said I would be the rector at the Cathedral of Christ the King in Atlanta, I would have said, ‘What are you smoking?’ The Holy Spirit, however, shows Himself in many ways, especially through people,” said Monsignor McNamee.

Monsignor McNamee, a native of Loughrea, Ireland, grew up in a family of five brothers and two sisters. He said the greatest gift he was given from his parents was the gift of faith.

“Every evening at 9 PM, we were all gathered to pray the rosary – as kids though sometimes we would pray that someone would come to visit us so we wouldn’t have to keep praying. My parents always prayed. My father was self-employed as an electrician. He wasn’t a great theological prayer. His was a simple faith.”

Monsignor McNamee said the image he remembers of his parents is his mom in bed with her book of prayers praying, and his father kneeling at the foot of the bed praying.



Early in his life, even in elementary school, Monsignor McNamee shared the idea of the priesthood was in his mind. As he got older, one of the moments he felt was most transformative to further his thoughts about the priesthood was an experience at Lourdes in high school. When he was there he felt the Lord was calling him to the priesthood.

“So in high school, one day, I had to go to the guidance counselor’s office and was asked what I wanted to be. I said, ‘I think I want to be a priest.’”

Telling the guidance counselor wasn’t that difficult, Monsignor McNamee shared. Then he needed to tell his parents.

After high school, he began his path to the priesthood by attending St. Patrick’s College. He said that one of the things that seems to often happen when a person makes a decision like one to be a priest is that some other things can happen unexpectedly.

“Not long after I made the decision to be a priest, my mother died suddenly of cancer when she was 46,” he said. “Then after two years they kicked me out and said I didn’t have a vocation,” he shared.

Monsignor McNamee said he didn’t want to be a priest in Ireland. His heart was to do missions in Africa.

“When I was told the seminary didn’t work out, I didn’t fight it. I was actually relieved.”

Monsignor McNamee then went back to the regular world for a few years, and was dating when “the calling” came again. So he applied for the African missions.

“After I applied, I wound up being one week away from entering seminary when the priest for the African missions said I couldn’t be accepted due to health issues (at age 4 he had to have his spleen removed). I didn’t know what to do, but God works in mysterious ways,” Monsignor McNamee

mentioned. “Then I got connected to St. John’s Seminary in Waterford. Once there Father O’Connor told me one day, ‘Have you ever heard of Atlanta, GA? That is mission territory.’ So I told him, ‘OK, I will go to Atlanta.’ Funny how the Lord works.”

Monsignor McNamee’s first assignment in the Atlanta area was in Peachtree City. His second was in Kennesaw. Then he was appointed to be the Administrator for a new mission in Roswell.

“The first time I went to see the property, what I saw was just 98 acres of farm land. The leader from the Archdiocese who was with me said, ‘We’re going to build a church, elementary school, and high school.’ I said, ‘We are?’ I was there for 10 years, and that’s how St. Peter Chanel began.”

Starting a church was an experience where Monsignor McNamee got to get into the little things of daily day-to-day stuff.



“To me, this is where I see the Spirit at work – in the ‘behind the scenes’ stuff. It’s really a spirit of gratitude. It is in the ordinary day-to-day activities of our lives that we see the Spirit at work. It is how we treat one another.”

He added, “I think sometimes we get so caught up in life, work, and things like that, that we just need to pause. That’s why I love Pope Francis’ comment that prayer is memory. Our life is a prayer itself. Even Jesus would have to go to a place and pray in silence.”

Monsignor McNamee then began taking questions from those in attendance, including CTK parishioner Mike Kirchner, who asked him what makes an area a mission.

“With the Roswell area, the Archdiocese looked at the area, saw the number of families, and said ‘we need a parish to accommodate the number of people.’ At St. Peter Chanel, we started with six families. Our first collection was \$3,556. You’re really starting from scratch.”

Long-time CTK parishioner, Dick White, who was in attendance, spoke up to add perspective to what Monsignor McNamee said.

“My family moved here in 1948,” said White. “Back then there were four Catholic churches in Atlanta: St. Anthony’s, Immaculate Conception, Sacred Heart, and the Cathedral of Christ the King. Probably less than 0.5% of the population was Catholic at the time. It was a different time. Catholics were discriminated against by the KKK.”

Monsignor McNamee added, “When the Cathedral of Christ the King was started 80 years ago, they wanted to put it where St. Philip’s was, but they were short \$5K so it located here where it is today. My goal as pastor over Christ the King school is to keep the vision and mission of the nuns of Sacred Heart alive. They were instrumental in the formation of the Cathedral of Christ the King. These nuns brought so much thought to Atlanta, whether it was here, at St. Jude’s or beyond. It’s very rewarding to see how vibrant the Catholic Church is here in Atlanta. Peers around the world are in awe we have 14 masses every weekend here at the Cathedral of Christ the King. Only thing is that we don’t get comfortable. The Lord is always challenging us.”

Monsignor McNamee was then asked to go back to some of his earlier remarks and share how he discerns when the Holy Spirit is growing and challenging us, versus when we are in despair.

Monsignor McNamee responded, “One gift of the Holy Spirit is patience – that whatever it is, it is going to work out. You may not be able to see it now. You just have to be patient. It’s going to cause discomfort and challenge us. We might think, ‘oh my goodness’ but we have to have perseverance. Change is not pleasant. God has a plan.”



John Monroe, CFO of TradeRocket, then asked, “How do you personally deal with not being in despair with so much negativity going around in the world?”

Monsignor McNamee reflected on the question, and then responded.

“I go back to a Monday afternoon a few weeks ago. I got a call from a friend, Fred, asking if the Cathedral was open. I learned from Fred that a student had just killed himself. I said, ‘OK, we’ll open it up.’ At 10:30 PM that night a classmate of the young man who killed himself sent a text to his friends saying ‘we’re going to meet at the Cathedral.’ When I opened up the Cathedral’s doors, there were over 100 kids there. We did a service and we’re there until after midnight. It’s moments like this that make it all worth it. They know the Catholic Church is always open. They could have gone anywhere, but they came here. We look for big things but it’s the small things where we see the heart of God at work.”