

Farewell was being given to the pastor who was leaving the parish. A leading local politician and a rich and influential was chosen to give a little speech at the dinner. But, for some reason, he was running late. So, the outgoing pastor decided to say his own few words while they waited.

He said, "I got my first impression of this parish from the first confession I heard here. I felt as if I have come to Sodom and Gomorrah. The very first person who entered my confessional told me all kinds of mortal sins against the 10 commandments including even one murder. As time went by, I came to realize that all the parishioners are not that sinful as this man said he was. Now, as I leave, after these years, I can certainly say that I had come to a fine parish, full of good and loving and caring people."

Just as the priest finished his talk the man who was supposed to give the farewell speech on behalf of the parishioners arrived full of apologies at being late. He immediately began to give his speech.

'I'll never forget the first day our parish priest arrived, 'said the man.' In fact, I had the honor of being the first one to go to him in confession.' All the eyes were on him.

I did not have the type of experience this pastor had. I do not even remember what was said in the first confession I heard. So, contrary to the pastor of my story, I felt that I have come to a very welcoming parish with hearts full of love for their pastor. And, in my 5 years here I have experienced nothing but, love, care and concern.

When I first came to Jefferson City in 2010, I did not expect to stay here this long. I had planned to return to India after 2-3 years as I have been doing in the past. But I liked the people and the diocese here so much that I have stayed on so long away from home.

After 5 years in Warsaw, Cole Camp and Hermitage I am leaving for my new assignments. But I am not leaving empty handed but with a wealth of experience. Working here has been a fantastic learning experience and I am thankful for the skills I have acquired. During my last assignment at St. Joseph Church, Palmyra, I had just one parish. After coming here, I learned how to serve multiple parishes. I feel as if being here with you all each day has made me a more complete and well-rounded person and a better priest and I have grown spiritually.

It's been a pleasure working here and I will truly miss it. I take with me fond memories, valuable skills. Many thanks to our staff, to our volunteers, to those who provided leadership support on our various councils and committees.

Thanks a lot each and every one of you for your love, care and concern shown to me in every way possible. Thanks also for your financial help to me personally and St. Ann's nuns in my home diocese.

As I depart from here, my parting message is from today's Gospel reading. Today's readings speak of the gift of life, both physical and spiritual, that God has given us. They urge and challenge us to be grateful for our health in body and soul and to use God's gifts of life and health responsibly. The first reading, taken from the Book of Wisdom, tells us that God gave us life and health, and that it was the jealousy of the Satan that produced illness and death.

Today's Gospel describes two of our Lord's miracles, the healing of a woman who suffered from a chronic bleeding disease and the returning of the dead daughter of Jairus to life. These healings teach us that Jesus wills life and wills full life for all God's children.

We are all called to share in the healing mission of the church. We can do this by visiting the sick, by praying for their healing, and by boosting their morale with our loving presence, and words of encouragement and inspiration. Thus, we may enable them to experience the compassion and love of Jesus the healer.

Then only together with the psalmist we can say, *"I will praise you Lord, for You have rescued me,"*