

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Reply to Our Lady of Grace

By Stephen Somerville

In my last column entitled, "Our Lady of Grace - New Church and Homilies" I wrote about two topics.

I first gave an update regarding whether or not a new Catholic church should be built in Aurora.

I made the point that I liked the present location as it seemed central for people and there was a bus stop right in front of the parish.

I also made the point that I would rather have any money that we would use to build a new church instead be used to fund various church programs or help those in our society who needed it.

I also turned my attention to homilies. This is what I wrote:

"The other item that I wanted to briefly comment on was the homilies delivered by our (or other) Priests, Deacons or by any invited guests to Our Lady of Grace. In this writer's humble opinion, brevity and message are key in a good homily.

"I believe that a homily should not be more than five to six minutes long and convey one or perhaps two central spiritual messages.

Too many times over the years I have seen and heard 20 minute and longer homilies that contain far too many intricate messages and, in some cases, seem to be rather a stream-of-conscious discourse with no central theme.

"As I listen to some of these long homilies and look around the church at my fellow parishioners, many people are either not paying attention or have tuned out, including, on a few occasions, yours truly.

"I know that in previous days or probably at other churches, the sermons were fairly long, but I think our priests and deacons need to take another look at their audience and understand that in this day and age of 500 television channels and social media, people's attention spans are shorter and we need messages that are more succinct, but hopefully continue to be thoughtful and uplifting."

At the end of the 8.15 a.m. church service two weeks back, Father Francis McDevitt took the time to respond to my column in his closing remarks to the members of the assembled congregation.

Among a number of things he stated that the length of the sermon that morning by Father Joshua was seven minutes and thirty five seconds. Father McDevitt also said that he had some time ago instructed homilists to keep their respective remarks under 10 minutes.

My response is as follows:

Upon quite a lot of reflection and re-examination regarding my column over the past week, if I could do it over again, I would have handled this issue differently. I should have first spoken to Father Francis or Father Joshua in person or on the phone or via e-mail to voice my concerns (and those expressed to me by many others) regarding the length of some of the sermons.

That would have been fairer to all.

Second, my comments in no way whatsoever reflect the hard work or the integrity of these people. I simply believe that on some occasions that the homilies have gotten too long.

I therefore apologize.

I like to think that, over the years, I have written many positive pieces about those involved with the church or the constructive contributions made by various organizations associated with the church. Over the last seven years, I have written about Welcoming Arms, the good works done by prior priests, and I have even written a recent column asking people to try and be on time at church. I have, on many occasions over the years, walked up to the homilist at the end of the service, shook their hand and offered them a kind word about how good their homilies were.

As someone who has attended this parish for over 20 years and had previously been elected to serve on the Parish Council, I wrote what I did simply in order, in my belief, to try and improve the collective experience for attendees.

I enjoy being part of the Our Lady of Grace community. The people and the volunteers are wonderful. I got married at this church and my son was baptized here.

I will continue as I have always tried to do with the unique privilege that comes with writing over 330 columns; look to shed light on the good, the positive and the interesting things that occur in our community.

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