

## **Homily – Fr. Paul Landolfi, SM**

Thanksgiving Mass for the Marianists of St. John's Residence in Rockaway Park, N.Y.  
May 20, 2012

Dear friends of the Marianists and St. John's,

Thank you for coming to wish us well as we prepare to leave St. John's, a work in which God enabled us to share these past 75 years. Yet, it is we, the Marianists, who should be thanking you. For through these 75 years, you have collaborated with us in serving our boys. In this Holy Mass we give special thanks to God for all of you who have partnered with us through the years, both in Brooklyn and in the Rockaways. So many of you have helped us and we are grateful.

I think of the Sisters of St. Joseph, whom we replaced when Bishop Molloy invited us to work with the older boys; the Sisters at Stella Maris convent, through the years and to this day, continue to collaborate with us.

Our present Board of Directors continues the great work which The Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum Association initiated many years ago. Believe me, this Board still works hard to protect the young men who come through our doors.

How can we not thank God for our dedicated staff? Some have worked with us for 10, 20 and 30 years. To our staff, working at St. John's means much more than having a job. Our Alumni come back remembering the kindness, the challenges, and the encouragement that staff members gave them while they were here.

We remember our volunteers, our teachers, our ombudsmen, our benefactors. Who can count the multitude who have helped us help our boys!

So many from this parish and from the Rockaways have assisted us through the years in Sports programs, the Red Door, at concerts, as catechists and tutors, the

Community Advisory Board, and the Rockaway Cluster of priests, religious, and lay persons serving the people of the Peninsula. St. Johns has always wanted to be a vital part of the Church's effort to be a positive force for peace and unity.

For all this, we thank our God, for this was the way we Marianists at St. John's were able to glorify our God and be of real service to our boys. This was our calling. Ask the Alumni what St. John's means to them! Don't overlook the tears of more than a few as they left the Home and you will realize the good God enabled us to do for them. And you helped us do this.

When the Marianists came to Rockaway, our Jewish brothers and sisters welcomed us and worked to form the Rockaway Catholic Jewish Council. Together, we were pioneers in proclaiming that we are all God's children and must work together to make a positive difference in our world.

All of you have collaborated in some way or other with our Marianist community. Together we tried our best to make the world more beautiful, a bit safer, and a healthier and saner place to live. Yes, God has blessed our efforts to help those less fortunate. We Marianists truly thank God for you today.

But what is to happen now? Isn't this the question on all our minds? We turn to the Word of God proclaimed to us today. It speaks clearly to our own present situation.

After the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus to His Father, the apostles and disciples were at a loss. They also asked, what do we do now? Once before after Jesus had died and risen, they had gone back to their former jobs. They were fishermen. Now they gathered together, fearful and concerned about the future.

St. John's faces a similar situation. Then, the apostles were asked to believe, to trust, and all they had was a promise. Jesus had told them: *I will always be with you until the end of time. You may come and go, but know that I will always be with you. I have given you my Spirit. The Spirit will teach you and guide you to understand and accomplish all that I want of you.*

We are reliving this mystery today. Yes, the Marianists will leave St. John's. But this is not an end, rather a new beginning. We trust in Jesus' promise that the power of God will be with you who remain to do all that is right for our boys. We also leave St. John's in your very capable hands.

Our staff possesses the spirit that animates the Home. We are family with all the joys, grief, and uncertainties of any family watching their children grow into maturity. We want to give the very best to our boys, not just what they might desire, but what they really need. With the blessing of God and His promise, with the dedication of our staff, and the continued help of Alumni, volunteers and benefactors, we are confident that St. John's will continue to serve young men in need.

The Marianists came here representing Mary, the Mother of Jesus, to whom they dedicated their lives. Our mission was to educate our boys, to help them grow up to be mature young men, just as Mary had done for Jesus. We continue to place St. John's under Mary's protection. She will always keep us focused on her Son Jesus who keeps reminding us of the promise: *I am with you always, even to the end of the world*. It is in His power, His Name, and His Mercy that we trust for the future.

But God's Word reminds us further of what our life's purpose, our goal, really is. *My dear friends, if God loves us so much, then we also must love one another. No one can see God, but if we love one another, then God remains in us and His love is brought to maturity in us.* I quote from one of our training brochures:

"From the very first day of its foundation to the present a vital part of the heart and spirit of St. John's Residence for Boys has been its firm faith in the love of and solid conviction that we are all important in bringing that love to our boys and their families . . . Our Statement of Philosophy begins and ends with a reference to God's love and concern. We never inquire whether a boy is a particular religious belief or upbringing. All creeds and faiths are welcome

. . . all staff are expected to give a witness of God's love and care to the boys we serve . . ."

Yes, it is God's love that led the Marianists to St. John's. It was God's love that we found here. It is God's love that will always remain here. *God is love and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.* This is the spirit that must animate St. John's.

As we prepare to leave, we Marianists offer a prayer for you as Jesus prayed to His Father for His disciples:

O Holy Father, keep St. John's always in Your Name. May it always fulfill Your will and purpose. Bless the young men you send to us and protect them from all harm. Guide our staff. Give them the wisdom and love to help our boys and their families. We thank You for the blessings of these 75 years. We ask Your special outpouring of Light and Strength on all those you sent to help us. Bless them and their families. Look mercifully upon all the Marianists who served here, both the living and the dead.

May you always bless our Church, our Diocese, and all of the Rockaways. On all the world, sprinkle abundantly the Spirit of your peace. Amen. May God bless us all. Amen. Amen.