

A homily by Ellen Green at St. Paul's, Henderson, May 12, 2013

When my mom first approached me saying that Father Rich would like me to give this homily, my first instinct was to politely decline. With the school year coming to a close, I had been trapped inside a whirlwind of thesis papers, cumulative exams, and final projects. I was planning my life around due dates and last thing I thought I could handle was adding another assignment to the list. Aside from that, what was I even going to say? When I was younger, I've stood up here before and told you guys about easier things, like my mission trips— but how was I supposed to come up with something truly meaningful and worthwhile for you guys to listen to? Everything inside me wanted to put on my nicest smile, make a quick apology, and then say no. However, something (aside from my mother's slight persuasion) made me decide to take this on.

When my parents decided to move our family from Hillsboro, Oregon to Henderson, Kentucky at the end of my 3rd grade year, I was skeptical to say the least. But with the promise of finally adopting a dog and the lure of having the ability to choose my room's new paint color, I begrudgingly piled into our family car along with my parents and three-year-old sister and together we embarked on a two-week, cross-country journey to our new home.

In spite of my reservations, Henderson welcomed our family with open arms. The summer of 2004 was full of taking care of the new dog, breaking in our new house, and of course, making new friends. While all of this was going on, an integral part of this whole process was our new congregation at St. Paul's. It was the acceptance we received at this church that has truly defined my family's experience here in Henderson.

Now that we are only about a week short of our ninth anniversary of living here in Henderson, I can see the value in the relationships my family and I have formed with the people of St. Paul's. From Miss Evelyn Champion teaching piano to both me and my sister, to Miss Margaret Stanley's legacy of providing scholarships to youth for All Saints (a camp which quickly became my second home), the people of St. Paul's have proven many times over how much they care about my family and about one another.

Beyond that, St. Paul's has enabled me to continue my spiritual growth as I've matured. When we first moved here, I was invited to become an acolyte, something allowed me to create a very personal relationship with the church service and the Eucharist. Down the road, I would be appointed head acolyte, a responsibility that I took on with pride. Likewise, it was St. Paul's' involvement in the church community at Henderson that gave me the means to attend (and later work with) Vacation Bible School. Through that program, I met Becky Durham and her youth group at the Presbyterian Church, who generously extended an invitation for me to go on mission trips with them. Even though I was working with another youth group, our congregation at St. Paul's leapt at the chance to help raise the funds for my trips, and upon my return, everyone was eager to hear all about my experiences in Rosebud, SD and then again in Swan Quarter, NC. Participation in these mission trips allowed me to grow even further in my faith by pushing me to extremes and showing me just how blessed my life really is. I cannot begin to thank the people of this church enough for giving me the opportunity to learn and mature in such a unique way.

On my fifteenth birthday, my family held a Quinceañera here at the church to recognize my Hispanic heritage. The love and support shown *once again* by my St. Paul's family was overwhelming, whether it was from attendance to the celebration or gifts. My parents and I are especially grateful for the Walaskay family, who helped plan the party and design my cake, practically becoming a 3rd set of grandparents for me during a time when all of our extended family lived across the country.

Even now, when I live two hours away and am only home for one Sunday a month, I know without a doubt that I will be welcomed back here with the same open, loving arms that greeted my family nine years ago. As many of you know, I graduated high school yesterday. And after what has literally been the hardest two years of my life, I am going to be starting a new chapter next year in Lexington. As scary as it is to leave behind the life I am used to living, I know that I can go in confidence, carrying the love and faith that I was taught by each and every one of you. I am also confident

in your ability to help my sister as you have helped me. Father Rich has done an amazing job of working on the spiritual part of the youth program and I know her involvement in the junior alter guild is something very important to her. I trust that you will all comfort and support her as you have for me in the past several years.

And so now, I come to the part where I actually tell you all why I decided to give this homily. I am doing this to thank you, to congratulate you, really and to tell you how grateful I am that God has placed this congregation in my life. Because even though in the past week, I had a biology final, a creative writing final, a photojournalism final, and a philosophy final (not to mention several emotional and mental breakdowns), I knew that at the end of it all, I would be graduating high school and coming home to all of you. And as stressed as I was, I owed my faith, strength, and courage to this congregation. So thank you all, so much for the love you've given me and my family over the past nine years. And really, the universe couldn't have picked a better gospel reading for today... Jesus said, "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Amen