

Introduction Address

St. John the Evangelist Church, Borger Texas
St Ann Mission, Stinnett, Texas

My name is Fr. Jim.

I'm your new pastor and I'm very happy to be here.

I'm looking forward to knowing you.

And, even more, I look forward *servi*ng you... to the best of my ability.

But first, I want to acknowledge the fact that
change is hard.

A change of pastor creates a certain level of *anxiety* within a parish.
It brings uncertainty.

Why is this the case?

I think it can be summarized in one word:

STRANGERS.

At this point, you and I are strangers to each other.

At this point, I know very little about you.

I'm not from this town.

I do not know your family.

I do not know your friends.

I have no idea if you prefer dogs over cats.
or if you prefer hamburgers over tamales.
If you are in high school, I have no idea if
you play football or play drums.

Right now, you and I are strangers.

But, someday, and I hope it soon,

I hope to be your neighbor, brother, maybe even your friend...

But most of all,

I hope to be one of the best priests you have ever known.

With God's good help, and in God's good time, this will occur.

So, how do we help God "get the ball rolling?"

Well, ask yourself this:

When strangers meet, what do they talk about?

How do they break the ice?

Usually, they talk about things like the weather,
or sports,
or what kind of music they like.

Myself, I listen to country.

Of course, you might enjoy or bluegrass or rhythm-and-blues

and, is so, right now you're thinking,

"This guy's nothing but a *plowboy*, a hayseed."

And you know what?

You're right!

But only partly right.

Because, the more you and I talk,

the more you realize

that one of the reasons that I enjoy country songs is because
a lot of them are funny.

For instance, there's that song of Kenny Chesney's,

"She thinks My Tractor's Sexy."

And a new song by Blake Shelton that goes like this:

Let's quite all this messing around. Let's get married.

You be the pretty. I'll be the funny.

You find the lot. I'll

You plant the flowers, I'll plant the kisses.

You park your car in driveway,

I'll park my truck in the yard.

*You pick the paint,
I'll pick the guitar,
And sing you a song
Out there with the crickets and the frogs.*

*You name the babies,
I'll name the dogs.*

I'm not saying have to like country music the way I do.
What I am really saying, what I'm letting you know
is that I have a sense of humor,
and I hope you like me because of it.

And this is how it starts, am I right?
This is how a stranger
 turns into an acquaintance
 who turns into a neighbor
 who turns into a friend.
All with God's good help, and in God's good time.

But this stranger you're looking at right now...
God did not send this stranger to Borger (Stinnett) to be your friend.
 Rather, God sent you this stranger
 to be more than friend,
 He sent me here to be your pastor.

What's the difference?
A friend knows what songs you listen to on the radio.
But pastor knows the songs that play in your heart.

What do I mean by "songs of the heart?"
 I mean the songs like the one hum as you make breakfast
 to get the day off to a good start.

And the songs you sing at Christmas time with your family...
and every single one of you is off key.

I also thinking about the song you sing to your children

when you tuck them into bed at night.

Or one that you danced to
with a handsome young man
at home-coming back in 1967,
the same man who gave you his heart, his life,
and has loved you with all his strength for 51 years.

I'm talking about a particular hymn that you sing here in church,
the one that catches in your throat every time you sing it
because it is the one they played at your mother's funeral.

These are the songs of the heart.

And when people sing these songs together
and learn the words by heart, strangers turn into friends.
And it happens in no better place
and in no better way than here at the table of the Lord,
this sacred place
where people you don't even know or recognize,
people of different backgrounds and ages,
cultures and countries...
people from all the world,
join their voices
to render worship to the Holy Trinity.

Today, in your eyes, I am a stranger.
But soon, I will be your priest and your brother.

And the Lord himself will teach us a new song.
A song of praise,
a song of hope,
a song that comes from the heart...the heart of the Church which is nothing less
than of heart of Christ, the Savior of the world.

It is a powerful teaching of the Catholic
—expressed in a beautiful way—
that affirms the truth that the Sacred Liturgy,
the offering of the Holy Eucharist,

is one with “the song of Christ that rings forever
in the halls of heaven.”

What an amazing mystery!
How privileged we are to join our voices
to that eternal song of love and gratitude!

A song with a strong beat
and mighty tempo.
 The song of faith.
 The song of worship.
 The song of endless joy
 that undergirds the Sacrifice of Praise we call the Mass.

It is my deepest honor
to lead you in singing this song,
which is to say,
it is my deepest honor to lead you in offering your life,
your entire life...
everything you have,
everything you love,
everything you are,
everything you long to be,
here on the altar of this church
in union with the sacrifice of Christ on the wood of the Cross,
day after day, Sunday after Sunday, year after year,
here in this place where strangers become neighbors,
and neighbors become friends,
and friends become disciples,
singing a song to God,
a love song to God.
 The song that echoes on earth
 the song of the angels and saints in heaven!

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My name is Fr. Jim.
And I look forward to serving you.
I look forward to serving you with all my strength.