Thank you Father Ron!

Reflections of a country Priest

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is hard to believe that this weekend marks my final weekend with you as your pastor.

When I arrived at St. Joseph Parish nearly a year ago, I knew I was coming to a parish with a rich history, strong traditions, and faithful people. What I did not fully realize was how much you would bless me in such a short period of time.

One of my favorite memories began almost immediately. Many evenings I would sit on the glider on the front porch of the rectory. Some of you stopped by to visit. We shared a beverage, shared a few laughs, exchanged stories, and simply got to know one another. What began as conversations between acquaintances quickly became friendships. Those visits helped me learn something very important about St. Joseph Parish—you are good people with generous hearts and a genuine love for one another.

As I prepare to leave, my heart is filled with gratitude.

Thank you for allowing me to walk beside you through the ordinary and extraordinary moments of life. Thank you for inviting me into your homes, your families, your joys, your struggles, and your dreams. Thank you for allowing me to minister with you, minister to you, and often be ministered by you. During this past year, I have witnessed the beauty of this parish family in countless ways.

I have stood beside hospital beds and prayed with those facing illness and uncertainty. I have celebrated baptisms as parents and grandparents welcomed new life into God's family. I have witnessed First Holy Communions, anniversaries, graduations, family celebrations, and countless moments of grace. I have celebrated funerals and entrusted loved ones to the mercy of God while watching families support one another through grief.

I have watched parishioners quietly serve behind the scenes without seeking recognition. I have seen teachers, staff members, volunteers, council members, musicians, lectors, servers, and countless others give generously of their time and talents for the good of the parish.

I have seen faith lived. Perhaps one of the greatest blessings for me has been simply getting to know you. Every conversation after Mass, every visit, every meeting, every prayer shared together became part of the gift of this year.

As many of you know, this past year has also been a challenging one for me personally. Through health struggles, medical appointments, treatments, and difficult decisions, your prayers, kindness, encouragement, and understanding have carried me more than you know. I am deeply grateful.

Many people view retirement as a joyful finish line. For me, this transition is more bittersweet. While my health has led me to this moment sooner than I had hoped, I trust that the Lord's plans are always greater than my own. Leaving parish ministry is not something I would have chosen for myself, and so there is both sadness and grief in my heart.

At the same time, I know that God is not finished writing my story. While this chapter of active parish ministry is ending, my priesthood is not. I will continue praying, serving, encouraging, and helping people encounter Jesus in whatever ways the Lord places before me. I ask for your continued prayers as I discover what God has planned for this next season of life.

Throughout this year, I have often reminded you that my goal in life is simple: to help each and every one of you get to heaven. That desire remains unchanged.

As I leave, I would like to share three great strengths I see in St. Joseph Parish and three ways we can continue growing as disciples of Jesus Christ.

1. You are a parish that cares deeply for one another. Time and again I have witnessed your generosity, your concern for neighbors, and your willingness to help those in need. When someone suffers, this parish responds. Continue growing by intentionally reaching out to those who may feel forgotten, disconnected, or on the margins. Sometimes the next person who needs our care is sitting only a few pews away.

2. You are a parish with a strong faith foundation. Your commitment to the Mass, your devotion to the Eucharist, your participation in parish life, and your desire to pass the faith on to future generations are real blessings. Continue growing by deepening your personal relationship with Jesus through daily prayer, Eucharistic Adoration, and frequent Confession. Strong faith is not only inherited; it must continually be nurtured.

3. You are a parish that loves its traditions and treasures its Catholic identity. That love has helped sustain St. Joseph Parish for generations. It is one of your greatest gifts. Continue growing by remaining open to where the Holy Spirit may lead you next. Every generation receives the faith as a gift, but every generation is also called to hand it on in new and effective ways.

There is one other hope I carry with me as I leave. Earlier this year, we began a parish conversation about the Eucharist and the placement of the tabernacle. While no decisions were made, my hope was never simply about furniture or location. My hope was, and remains, that the conversation would help all of us grow in our awareness of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

The greatest gift of those months was not a plan or a proposal, but the opportunity to pray, learn, listen, and reflect together on the central place of the Eucharist in our lives. Whether in the celebration of Mass, time spent in Adoration, moments of quiet prayer before the tabernacle, or frequent reception of Holy Communion, Jesus continues to invite us closer to Himself.

As you move forward with Father Tony, I encourage you not to let that conversation end. Continue praying. Continue listening. Continue discerning together. Most importantly, continue keeping Jesus in the Eucharist at the center of parish life, for He is the source and summit of everything we do.

As you welcome Father Tony, please offer him the same kindness, support, patience, and prayers that you have shown me. Every pastor brings different gifts, experiences, and perspectives. Give him the opportunity to shepherd you in the way God is calling him to do so.

As for me, I leave with a grateful heart. I will carry the memories of this parish with me. I will remember your faith, your generosity, your laughter, your kindness, and your love for the Lord.

Most importantly, I will continue praying for you. Please continue praying for me as well.

One year ago, many of us were strangers. Today, I leave as a friend. Conversations on the front porch became friendships, friendships became blessings, and those blessings will remain with me as I begin this next chapter of life.

Sincerely yours in Christ, Fr. Ron

P.S. You have my cell number so you can call or text at anytime. My new address will be: Fr. Ron Schock 245 Lincoln Court Plymouth Ohio 44865.

And never forget what I have told you so many times,

Don't forget, *You are a Saint in the Making!*