

January 2024

Saint Raphael



MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

St. Raphael School Open House

During the Month of January there are many exciting activities happening in and around St. Raphael School.

St. Raphael School was founded by the Sisters of the Humility in 1949. Saint Raphael School started with just four classrooms and 130 pupils receiving religious education and an academic curriculum. Today, we have grown to become one of the largest Catholic schools in the Diocese with 27 homerooms catering to almost 600 students. Saint Raphael School has made remarkable progress over the years with students leading the nation with their standardized testing scores, the development of successful sports programs that build caring and compassionate student-athletes, and building enhancements to meet the needs of a growing school community. The school now boasts a renovated library and an Innovation Center designed to expand the STREAM curriculum. Most importantly, we live our Catholic values and Faith by creating intentional disciples who strive to leave the world better than we found it. Twice a year, in November and January, Saint Raphael School hosts Open House events. This year, on January 17, 2024, at 7:00 pm, Saint Raphael School will open its doors to showcase our values and accomplishments to incoming Kindergarten and new families. Our student ambassadors,

administration team, teachers, and representatives provide personalized tours to answer any questions our new families may have and share our experiences. Our student ambassadors offer a firsthand look at our classrooms and how our faculty/staff works together. Our administrative team is available to answer any questions and familiarize families with our curriculum and vision. Lastly, representatives from our Raider's Club (before and after school care) and Home and School provide information on how their groups support our students. Families are invited to bring their children to experience our STREAM program, play with robots, and use the Glowforge Laser Printer to make a present to take home with them. We aim to make prospective families feel at home and part of our loving community.

We conclude January and begin February by celebrating our students, families, staff, parishioners, and Religious brothers and sisters during Catholic Schools Week. This week-long celebration brings our Kindergarten to 8th-grade students together with each other and our parish community. It is a true representation of how the Saint Raphael school community is centered around Faith, Family, Formation, and Future.

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Homilies Don't Just Happen

by Joy Horvath

I'll admit I'm "of a certain age," and therefore am expected to have some wisdom to share. Maybe once in a while... But could I preach something wise and meaningful every weekend, as we expect our homilists to do? How do our priests prepare a homily *every week* that is brief, thoughtful, meaningful, and that fosters an encounter with God? I sat down with Fr. Jim to learn more about the process.

Fr. Jim described three phases of planning for an effective presentation. He begins where we all should, with prayer. Fr. Jim reminds us that while the *Holy Bible* may have stories and historical events within it, it is not meant to be read as either a novel or a history textbook. Rather, it is God's message to us, His People. It is important to approach the sacred texts reverently, with a sense that God is trying to communicate with us. Fr. Jim aims first to personally connect with that message. Does a word or phrase stand out? Is the text prodding him to act?

Then Fr. Jim calls on his theological background and sources to analyze the text. For the Gospel of Matthew, he especially likes *Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word*, a detailed four volume study of Matthew by the Trappist monk and theologian Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. Fr. Simeon Leiva-Merikakis, OCSO, Order of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance, is a noted translator, author, and retreat master who resides at St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts.

Finally, Fr. Jim focuses on relating the Scripture message to daily living. How can he connect to peoples' lives? What is happening in the church community that needs to be addressed? In his homily, he likes to use stories to bring the message down from abstract to concrete; he tries to show, not just tell. He acknowledges that each congregation member is in a different situation, and that not everyone will be touched by his message in the same way. The person in the pew next to you might need inspiration for reconciliation with family or friends, another might need prompting for generosity, and someone else might need to ask for forgiveness. The challenge for Fr. Jim is to somehow nourish each soul with some spiritual food. He hopes parishioners can say, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Fr. Jim writes out his sermons, and stores a copy of each on his computer. Thus far he has not repeated or recycled any homily, since he has a different thought each time he preaches on any particular passage. His favorite homilies are for funerals, as they're uplifting and positive. My husband reminded me that in pre-Vatican II times,

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The Eucharistic Miracle of Sokółka, Poland, 2008



As related by Blessed Carlo Acutis in the following extract from his website of Eucharistic Miracles, miracolieucaristici.org

On October 12, 2008, at the church dedicated to Saint Anthony of Sokółka, the Holy Mass of 8:30 AM is celebrated by a young vicar, Filip Zdrodowski. During Communion, unknowingly the Host falls from the hands of one of the priests. A woman kneeling, ready to receive the Eucharist, makes him notice it. The priest remains paralyzed from fright and believing it was dirty, places it in the vasculum, a small silver vessel which contains the water utilized by priests to wash their fingers after distributing Communion. At the end of the Holy Mass,

the sacristan, Sister Julia Dubowska, takes the vasculum with the Host, and for increased safety, pours it into another vessel which she then locks in the safe where the chalices were kept.

A week later, on Sunday, October 19, around 8:00 AM, the sister opens the safe and finds the Host almost dissolved but with some strange red clots in the center. She immediately calls the priests to show them what was discovered. The Host was mostly dissolved. Only a very small piece of the consecrated bread was left, tightly interconnected to the substance that appeared on its surface. Actually, part of the Host was joined to that "strange red clot". The pastor of Sokółka then contacted the Metropolitan Curia of Białystok. Archbishop Edward Ozorowski together with the Chancellor of the Curia, priests and professors examined the Host and, astounded, decide to wait for the development of the events and to see what would happen next. On October 29 the vessel containing the Host is brought into the parish chapel and locked in the tabernacle; the next day, on order of the Archbishop, Father Gniedziejko delicately removes with a small spoon the partially dissolved Host with the blood-colored substance on its interior and places it on a pure white corporal, with a red cross embroidered on its center. The corporal is kept in the case used for keeping and carrying the Hosts, to be then locked again in the tabernacle. Over time the Host "fused" with the corporal and the red "clot" dried. Only then two scientists of global fame and specialists in pathological anatomy at the Medical University of Białystok were consulted. The Metropolitan Curia of Białystok has released this declaration concerning the Eucharistic Miracle that occurred at Sokółka:

1. "On October 12, 2008, a consecrated Host fell out of the hands of a priest while he was distributing Holy Communion. He picked it up and placed it in a vessel filled with water, in the tabernacle. After Mass, the vessel containing the host was placed in a safe present in the sacristy.



Monstrance of Sokółka

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2. On October 19, 2008, after opening the safe one could clearly see a red stain on the Host that had fallen, which with the naked eye immediately gave the impression of being a bloodstain.
3. On October 29, 2008, the vessel containing the Host was transferred to the tabernacle of the chapel of the rectory. The next day the Host was removed from the water contained in the vessel and placed on a corporal inside the tabernacle.
4. On January 7, 2009, the sample of the Host was taken and examined independently by two professionals in histopathology at the University of Medicine of Białystok. They issued a common declaration which states: 'The sample sent for evaluation looks like myocardial tissue. In our opinion, of all the tissues of living organisms, this is the one that resembles it the most.'
5. The Commission has noted that the analyzed Host is the same one that has been moved from the sacristy to the tabernacle in the chapel of the rectory. Intervention by a third party has not been found.
6. The case of Sokółka does not contradict the faith of the Church, but rather confirms it."

At the beginning of January of 2009, the Curia of Białystok asked two eminent specialists in pathological anatomy of the Medical University of Białystok - Professor Maria Elżbieta Sobaniec-Łotowska and Professor Stanisław Sulkowski - to analyze the samples of the bloodstained Host. On January 7, Professor Sobaniec-Łotowska went to Sokółka and took from the corporal a minuscule sample of the mysterious substance present in the Host.



Sister Julia Dubowska

The professors of the UMB University had underlined that, in the case of the examined Host, in the sample they have found numerous biomorphological indicators typical of cardiac muscle tissue such as, for example, the phenomenon of segmentation, namely damage to the fibers of the tissue of the cardiac muscle in the section where communicating junctions [structures characteristic of the cardiac muscle] are found, and the phenomenon of fragmentation. Such damages are visible in the form of numerous small lesions. These alterations can be observed only in fibers that were not necrotic, that is alive, and show signs of the fast spasms of the cardiac muscle typical of the extreme phase preceding death.

Another important evidence of the fact that the material analyzed corresponded to human cardiac muscle tissue was the central position of the cellular nucleus in the observed fibers, a typical characteristic of cardiac muscle fibers... The two scientists of Białystok declared... "Some signs that can correspond to nodes of the contractions have been observed on the section of several fibers. Instead, during the analysis with the electronic microscope, the outlines of the communicating junctions and the thin filaments of the myofibrils were visible". Moreover, the cardiac tissue was joined to the consecrated Host in an inseparable manner. In the report of the examination performed by Professor Sobaniec-Łotowska and Professor Sulkowski, we find written: "The material resulted was sufficient for the examination; it indicates that it is cardiac muscle tissue, or at least the most similar to it among all the living tissues of an organism".

"And, something very important, the material analyzed is composed in all respects of cardiac muscular tissue". This affirmation is reported in the "Communication of the Metropolitan Curia of Białystok" of October 14, 2009, concerning the Eucharistic phenomena at Sokółka. The professors discovered also other unexplainable elements.

"The Host remained in water for a long time and it remained in the corporal for an even longer period of time. The tissue that appeared on the Host would therefore have had to undergo the process of autolysis, namely the process of self-destruction by the action of the intracellular enzymes; in the material analyzed there were not however observed traces of these alterations!",

the two luminaries declared. Another very interesting event observed consists in that the substance found on the corporal, although slightly changed after being removed from the water(it had simply dried) a couple of years ago, it did not change its appearance despite having been neither stabilized nor preserved at a particular temperature. "This signifies that if the miracle were due to a bacterium, the material would have disintegrated, crumbled and would have changed appearance. Any microbial culture, even placed on the cleanest possible material, after a single week appears completely different" added Professor Sulkowski.

"At first I was convinced that it was a blood clot" - said Professor Sobaniec-Łotowska. But the truth was much more surprising! The two scientists of Białystok, who for their own independent investigations, made use of the most modern optical microscopes and the transmission electronic microscope, have reached the same conclusion (Professor Sulkowski, did not know that the sample which he was examining came from a Host): the sample examined was neither a clot, nor blood... it was a human cardiac muscle tissue still alive. And, something even more incredible, it was a cardiac muscle with typical indications of the final phase that precedes death.



*Professor Maria
Sobaniec-Łotowska*

And yet, several people, who not only have never analyzed the material but they had neither seen it with their own eyes, have affirmed that the red color of the Host is due to prodigiosin, a red pigment produced by the bacterium *Serratia marcescens*. "Obviously, this is absurd" affirmed the specialists of Białystok,



*Professor Stanisław
Sulkowski*

also because the material observed corresponds to cardiac muscle and not to a bacterium. The scientists of Białystok have analyzed the sample taken in purely scientific terms and not fideistic. Several accusations were even more absurd, like the one put forth by the group

of so-called "rationalists" according to whom the tissue analyzed pertained to a murdered man. The professors reacted with a statement in which they expressed "a profound indignation for the fact that the public opinion was led in error by false pseudoscientific hypotheses on the analyzed phenomenon, above all on the part of people who ignore the particulars relative to the analysis, who have neither access to the material analyzed, nor to the documentation collected, and who often do not even know the analytical techniques applied". The drafting of the protocol on the part of the two scientists of Białystok required two weeks. When the Curia of Białystok became aware of the incredible results of the analyses, it formed a special Ecclesiastical Commission convened by the Archbishop on March 30, 2009.

His task consisted in examining the miracle from the theological point of view and in listening to all who had seen the Host or who had been witnesses of those extraordinary events. The commission also had the task of dispelling any doubt of deception and of ascertaining that no one had furtively substituted the Host in the tabernacle. The representatives of the commission – the distinguished professors of the Seminary of Białystok – interrogated all the witnesses, verifying the sincerity of their testimonies. The work undertaken by the Ecclesiastical Commission has produced the following statement: "The Host from which the sample was taken for the examination is the same one that has been transferred from the sacristy to the tabernacle of the chapel in the rectory. The intervention of strangers was not observed". This was moreover categorically excluded also by the two scientists of Białystok. It was not possible that someone had placed a fragment of a human body in the tabernacle. What made one think so? The fragments which composed the Host were tightly interconnected to the fibers of the human tissue; they penetrated each other, as if a fragment of "bread" had suddenly transformed itself in "body". It is not possible to manipulate an event of this type. No one, absolutely no one, would have been able to do it. "Even the scientists of NASA, who have at their disposal the most modern analytical techniques, would not be able to artificially recreate such a thing", affirmed Professor Sobaniec-Łotowska, adding that this fact has been for her of particular importance.



Dominicana

The Good News of Divine Wrath

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by Br. Cyril Stola, O.P.

Divine wrath is good news. The Gospel is good news, after all, and the Gospel declares divine wrath over and over again. Indeed, the Gospel of Matthew records five long teaching discourses of Jesus, and at the end of each of them, Jesus speaks of the righteous earning an eternal reward and the wicked going off to eternal punishment (see Matt 7:15-29, 10:37-39, 13:44-50, 18:21-35, and 25:31-46). Jesus frequently disputes with Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests, and scribes, and he does not shy from showing anger at their deeds: “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how can you flee from the judgment of Gehenna?” (Matt 23:33). Jesus further reveals that he will personally come again to judge the living and the dead, promising that he will send “those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:29).

This can be rather surprising. Jesus says that he came that we “might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). He taught us: “love your enemies, do good to those who hate you” (Luke 6:27). Jesus is rich in mercy, ever delighted to forgive sinners. But the fact that Jesus judges men and condemns some to punishment—even eternal punishment—does not oppose his benevolence to mankind or his mercy. Christ’s judgment is, in fact, a great mercy, for judgment establishes justice in creation.

Injustice marks our world. Men and women murder innocent people, deceive others, and abandon their families and commitments. Yet God does not deign to leave his creation in shambles. He promised to right every wrong, and punishing sin is *necessary* in that process. It is bad for anyone to profit *in any way* from doing evil, and God’s punishment takes away all ill-

gotten gains. By Christ’s judgment, every murder and assault, every slander and lie, every theft and blasphemy will come to the light and be punished, and no profit from these evils will remain.

Even beyond restoring the order of justice, punishment is a medicine for the greatest spiritual sickness: sin. Sin warps us and taints us. The more we sin, the more we learn to love the evil we do. Jesus hates sin because it ruins the people he loves, corrupting them



Job Pointing to the Abyss of Hell.

c. 1410. Egerton Master.

and deadening them to the divine life he offers. His message of punishment reveals just how ugly and offensive sin actually is. If the God who is all-knowing and all-loving despises sin with such intensity, we ought to hate our sin and our wicked desires. The revelation of divine wrath calls us to a conversion which demands our transformation. In Romans, Saint Paul describes our salvation as a result of *justification*. By grace, God *makes us just*. We can truly become worthy of eternal life if we allow God to shatter the sin that gets in the way of that. We should view all God's punishments in that light, minding what he said long ago: "Do I not rejoice when [the wicked] turn from their evil way and live?" (Ezek 18:23).

Jesus, by his judgment, will establish lasting and perpetual justice, and this is good news indeed. In the *Creed* and the *Te Deum*, we even announce rather joyfully that Jesus will come again and be our judge. It is a happy thought since Jesus is not a judge "who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). He is a judge who makes it rather clear how to attain a good verdict and how to find an ally on the bench: "You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father" (John 15:14-15). There is no way to heaven but by judgment. By shunning the sin Christ hates and by trusting that he desires to justify us, we can seek his help to attain true conversion. By his grace, we will be made worthy—and thus be judged worthy—of eternal bliss.



Faith FORMATION

January Calendar

January 8: Star of Bethlehem (7- 9 pm)

January 9, 16, 23, 30: Bible Study (10-11:30 am)

January 22: Celebrating with the Saints (7- 8:30 pm)

January 23: Trivia Night (7- 8:30 pm)

All events in the Community Room

St. Raphael

CHURCH

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Homilies Don't Just Happen (Continued)

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weekday Masses did not include homilies, but Fr. Jim indicated that priests are now encouraged to include them. His weekday Mass homily preparation is less time-consuming, and the homilies are shorter but no less meaningful.

As much as the homilist has a responsibility to prepare well, we the congregation are obligated to listen well. Fight off distraction and focus on the preached word. Fr. Jim likes to see nonverbal communication like a woman nodding or a man pensively rubbing his chin. In addition, wouldn't it be helpful to prepare for Mass

by looking at the daily readings? You can find a link at <https://bible.usccb.org> (also on the St. Raphael Parish web site) to have the day's readings delivered to your inbox. After Mass, think about what the homilist said. What was the main point? What was one thing I learned about God? What is God calling me to do as a result? Preaching is not a speech, but rather a spiritual dialog between speaker and listener. Pay attention, look for the message, and reflect on its personal meaning.

Liturgy Schedule

Saturday Vigil: 4:30 p.m. | **Sunday:** 8:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., Noon

Weekday Mass: M, T, W, F, 7:45 a.m. | M, T, Th, F, 9:15 a.m.

Confessions: Saturdays 3:00 - 4:00 p.m. | **Eucharistic Adoration:** Friday 10:00 a.m. - Saturday 4:00 p.m.