

## FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

### Heart, Mind and Soul

*NOTE: It would be best before reading this article to carefully read or reread my 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary article (entitled 40 years and counting) that was sent out on Memorial Day weekend. It is still available on our Facebook page and our webpage [sjparish.org](http://sjparish.org) under 'about' then "From the Pastor's Desk."*

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Since my arrival at St Joseph two years ago, I have authored many articles for this series entitled "*From the Pastor's Desk*." I have shared a lot of stories about my life from growing up in Philadelphia to my experiences as a priest and my love for trains. If you are perceptive, you will notice that I am sharing bits and pieces of my life. Sometimes I throw in something more religious to break up the series. They are the template (including many articles written but not released) for an autobiography which I hope to complete by the end of 2029. In other words, these articles are outlines only of what will be in my book. I have bounced the stories around with you from something about my youth, summer vacations, my experience of 40 years of priesthood, to most recently about a day in my life in the summer of 1966. Through these articles you have learned a lot about me, but in this article, I want to share with you more about Father John Connell and how he works. I entitle this one "*Heart, Mind, and Soul*". My intention is not to share the personal aspects of my heart or soul or mind with you, but to give all of you a clearer picture of how I work. Father John is a complicated person.

**MIND:** Although I can clearly remember a day from my youth in Philadelphia or give to you details of a day I spent in the seminary, I do not have hyperthymesia or an Eidetic memory like Sheldon in the "*Big Bang Theory*". I have never been diagnosed with either. I have never been diagnosed with any mental issue although I put myself on the spectrum based on how I process things in this mind of mine. I will acknowledge there is a lot of stuff in this head. Somethings are there temporarily: such as a homily, data for a meeting, or a talk that I am giving. These come and go, but other thoughts and information are stored in my mind. I really can't explain why I can remember music in the detailed way I do. I am not really a mathematician. I was an average student throughout my school days and had a speech impediment which required therapy to work it out. I was just an average "C" student. The use of my mind as storage came about in the late 60's around the death of Robert F. Kennedy. As an average student, with a physical disability in my leg, awkward movements and inability to learn normally, I started to master my mind rather than my body. It started with music, but then I started to assign events to dates and put them in my mind. I practiced every day. My brothers would go off to basketball or football practice and I would practice increasing the ability of what I could store in my mind.

It is in this mind that I have my deepest thoughts of God and my most profound understanding of how he works in my life and in the world. I never really share these with anyone because I do not understand them completely myself. I said in my article celebrating 40 years as a priest, that "*I am at peace as well that my spirituality is lived out only in my head.*" Emotions and heart have only played an exceedingly small secondary role in my spiritual life.

My mind is helpful in the organization of my thoughts and ideas, but I will admit that it makes me sometimes awkward in conversations with people. It has made me more introverted and reserved than most priests you will meet. I ask for your continued patience in ministering to you.

**SOUL:** Ever since I was a little boy, my essence of who I am (my soul) has been longing for something greater than myself. My mind has helped me understand that this is my longing for our Lord. As a priest and child of God, it all makes sense. All of you see my soul on display at Mass as I celebrate with joy the Lord's presence in the Eucharist. As you can imagine, it is closely connected to my mind. Not to the part that stores information, but the part that relates to God. Over the decades I have realized as I stated in my 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary article, my ability to listen intently is really because my soul is reaching out to those I am listening to as my God reaches out to me. My soul has revealed two gifts that I often share with everyone: my empathy and my desire to bring peace. Deep down I am simply sharing this from my soul hoping that it helps those who are hurting. My soul is on display when I smile at Mass. My soul is on display when I say, "everything will be okay" and my soul is on display when I try to show others the path to peace. My soul and mind communicate daily. This is my prayer time. My mind speaking to my soul, my soul speaking to my mind, my mind and soul speaking to God.

## **HEART**

If you have read my 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary article you will easily be able to deduce that my heart has been given to those that I have served over the years in my various assignments. My heart has always been in the ministry I do as a priest. The way I live that out is promising to those I serve that I am here for them. My consistent work ethic is the way I reveal my heart. My heart is revealed as well in my style of preaching and my care of those in need. My heart is revealed in my desire to lead my people into the future. My heart is revealed as I shepherd all of you at St Joseph. You must believe me when I say my heart really does belong to the people I serve especially all of you at St Joe. I am sure most of you are wondering about the 'other' aspect of my heart; the ability to love. I remind you about all those ancient Greek types of love; the only healthy ones available to priests are *philia* and *agape*. I have my family (namely, my brother Kevin), and a few other dysfunctional siblings and I have a few close friends, that satisfies *philia*. The closest I get to *agape* love is when I mentor my young associates and dedicate my entire life to those I serve. I will admit, my heart aches at times when difficulties arise in the parish and in my life, but the Lord does provide in amazing ways.

What I am really saying in this article is that Father John Connell is here for all of you. You have my heart, soul and mind as does my Lord. The way that I connect can be awkward at times. Sometimes I am not very outgoing. I hope in this year ahead to get to know more of you. I would like that. I truly want to know all of my parish family and for you to know more about this unique and different priest who happens to be your pastor.      **Father John**