

### ***The Return of Summer and The Summer of Return***

Summer has returned! The season brings with it what it usually brings: heat and humidity, gardens to weed and grass to mow, summer fun and summer storms, and let's not forget those seasonal "State Birds," mosquitoes!

We shouldn't be surprised. Summer returns every year, just as God promised. After the Flood, God told Noah, "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22).

As a further reminder and seal of God's promise, He gave us something we often see after summer storms: the rainbow. That bow has been used and abused by many for many different (and many certainly unholy) purposes, but push those aside and remember what God said of it: "I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh" (Genesis 9:13-15).

During this difficult and deadly year of pandemic, I wonder how many people have remembered that promise. Most of us seem to have been fixated on human solutions to the dangers around us: social distancing, masks, hand sanitizers, vaccines. I don't dismiss those things, for they have been and are real and useful tools in this medical battle we have waged. But how many of us during this past year were fixated *first* on God, His promises, and His care for us?

I'll admit, there were times when the news about COVID-19 was so inescapable and overwhelming, it was hard to stop listening to the news reports and listen instead to God's words. There were times when it was much easier to see an angry God, One who might be settling accounts with this sinful world, rather than a loving God who was taking care of us through the mess we faced.

But whether we realized it or not, He did take care of us. Whether we remembered Him or not, He remembered us, and acted for us. That is something we should not take for granted—ever. That is something for which we should thank Him—always!

As we celebrate the return of summer over these next few months, I expect we'll also be celebrating a summer of return. Restrictions are rolling back, travel is opening up, and masks are coming off. All of us are looking forward to a summer of return to "normal," though we might not know what "normal" will look like. Lasting changes followed September 11, 2001. I expect to see lasting changes after the Pandemic of 2020.

That's not a bad thing if the "normal" to which we return is the "return" spoken of through the prophet Joel: "Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster." (Joel 2:13) If our "new normal" is a return to the life of repentance and faith to which God has called us, a life that centers around God, His Word, His Sacraments, His Church, then for that, too, we can say, "Thanks be to God!"