

St. Anthony Indian Mission

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May 2023



From the desk of Fr. Patrick McGuire

Warm greetings once again from the sun-baked high desert, where trees are blooming, birds are singing, and weeds are growing at an alarming rate.

There is a strangely tense but lighthearted mood in the School this month as we rapidly approach the end of the school year. The students are eagerly awaiting the summer vacation (some think it is here already), and the teachers are rushing to complete their own work -- including meeting the demands of many supporting institutions. May is a month when everyone tries to bring their year's work to a conclusion: reports have to be submitted, applications for the new school year have to be made, and of course, endless meetings are summoned.

Amid all this activity, time has to be taken to arrange the meaningful ceremonies and events that tell the students "well done" for all their efforts. It is also a time for the graduating class to come to terms with their transition away from our homely environment into the wider world.

One such event is the May Crowning of the statue of the Blessed Virgin. This is a church service arranged and conducted by the graduates. The students all wear their traditional Zuni dress for the occasion, and they give thanks for their inherited Zuni culture, as well as the Christian values and beliefs that they will carry with them. The focus of the service is, of course, the crowning of the statue. Mary is the first and greatest of the "communion of saints" and placing the crown upon her is a reminder of the greatness that can be achieved when lives are led in communion with the divine will.



Each year this is a beautiful moment in the life of St. Antony's. Many of the parents and grandparents come to witness and pray during the brief but beautiful service. Their pride in the children is awesome to behold. This year one grandmother (age 91) said to me, "even if I have to limp all the way here, I would never miss this for the world." Perhaps they can't quite articulate how they feel, but their presence -- and the pride and joy they take in their children (and grandchildren!) -- speaks more than a thousand words.

After the service, the graduating class poses for photographs, still in their traditional dress. At the graduation ceremony the students will be free to wear whatever fashionable attire they choose, so these "photo ops" are all the more significant for our staff as they see a visible representation of what they have tried to achieve over many years of teaching, encouraging and caring for these beautiful young people.

I confess that at the graduation -- although I will be brimming with smiles and laughter -- there will also be a sadness in my heart as I see these youngsters, whom I have known for so long, move away and take their place within their community. These are sentiments which I know our teachers share as well; they can be proud of a job well done. We and you have done our best for them now; we can but bless them with our prayers.

May is also the time for our First Holy Communions, when I get to lay aside my tasks as school administrator and take up my true role as pastor. This year will be extra-special. We have 17 young people who will receive Holy Communion for the first time, and six of them will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation during the Mass. (Our diocese has been working for several years to reduce the age for Confirmation, so that children of an appropriate age can be confirmed at First Holy Communion. This will be our first time doing so.)

There are many preparations to be made for this event, not the least of which will be the breakfast after the Mass. The First Communicants (and their pastor) will partake of a magnificent meal with all the trimmings. Ms. Virginia assures me that both pancakes and bacon will be in abundant supply. Sr. Marsha has been busy arranging decorations for the cafeteria, as well as memento candles for each of the Communicants. Amidst all the excitement, I must not forget to thank the teachers, who have given so much of their time to prepare the young ones for this great day. The church will be too small to accommodate everyone who would like to be there, so the Mass will be "live-streamed" on Saturday, May 13th. It will remain on the site until the end of the month. There will be lots to report in my next letter!

Although it is exciting to anticipate these year-end events, we must not forget that we are an academic institution and we need to finish strong! The last round of testing is taking place as I write to you. I am sure that our students will excel as our well-seasoned teachers keep them focused on the task. I notice that with the good weather, gym classes are taking place outside and the cafeteria chat is all about the upcoming summer camps. We have summer school, art camp, bible camp and sports camp all lined up for when the School is on vacation. The kids are just as excited as their Pastor!

As we come to the end of the first century of St. Anthony's, we give thanks for all that has been achieved and are confident that even greater things lie ahead. Onwards and upwards! Thank you for making it all possible.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Fr. Pat". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Fr. Patrick McGuire