



St. John Paul II

Parish Family

Video #4 – Your Rights

As was mentioned before, the Archbishop needs to hear those whose rights can be affected. So what exactly are your rights? As a legal system, Canon Law lays out many of the rights and obligations of the members of this society of the Church. If you are interested in learning more about the rights and obligations of the laity, a good place to start is to read canons 204-231 in the Code of Canon Law (available online). This encompasses the sections in the Code detailing “The Christian Faithful,” “The Obligations and Rights of All the Christian Faithful,” and “The Obligations and Rights of the Lay Christian Faithful.” For now, we will look at a few of your rights, which seem especially important as they relate to the canonical unification.

Canon Law says that “The Christian faithful are free to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires” (c. 212 §2). It is important to know that you actually have a right to make your needs and desires known to your pastor. As a part of this process, we are receiving your feedback which will be seen by your pastor, and in this way you will be able to exercise this right. It’s worth noting that, while you have the right to make your needs/desires known, Canon Law does not guarantee that every desire will be satisfied; there is a difference between making your will known and having your will done. Fortunately, your pastor Fr. Fox has continuously invited your feedback in his bulletin articles and through other forms of communication; he has shown himself to be very concerned about honoring this right that you have.

Another right you have is to receive the sacraments – “The Christian faithful have the right to receive assistance from the sacred pastors out of the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the word of God and the sacraments” (c. 213) and “Sacred ministers cannot deny the sacraments to those who seek them at appropriate times, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them” (c. 843 §1). These are very powerful statements, especially that you cannot be denied the sacraments if you seek them at the appropriate times and are properly disposed. This means that if I’m standing in the back of the church playing solitaire on my phone and you ask me to hear your confession, I am legally obligated to hear your confession and honor that right. Of course, we can see that this is not an unqualified right; if you were to ask me to hear your confession as I’m walking down the aisle for Mass, I can reasonably say “not right now.” The point here is that, after the canonical unification, your right to receive the sacraments will continue to be honored. You will still be able to have your children baptized, go to Mass, have your confession heard, get married, and be anointed. The canonical unification will not only not harm these rights, but it will hopefully make your priests more available to serve you through the sacraments when the administrative work of running multiple parish corporate realities is streamlined into one parish corporate reality.

Finally, in the canon on church buildings, we see that a “church” is understood a sacred building designated for divine worship to which the faithful have the right of entry for the exercise, especially the public exercise, of divine worship” (c. 1214). So you actually have a right to enter the church buildings for the worship of God. This is very important because, after we become one canonical parish, you will still have the right to enter the various church buildings (I will speak more about the church buildings not closing in the next post). Again, this is not an unqualified right – you have the right to enter the church, but it doesn’t mean that you have the right to enter the church whenever you want. In the evenings, we lock the churches in order to keep them safe. If you call me at 1:00 AM demanding that I open the church because of your rights, I can reasonably tell you that’s not happening and please go to bed.

The fact that the Church lays out specific rights that you have in Canon Law is a way of honoring your dignity and ensuring that you receive what you need and what you are owed from the Church. I hope that you can see that the process of canonical unification will not damage your rights, and will hopefully lead to your rights being honored more diligently through a more streamlined approach of managing and operating one corporate/parish reality.