

UNDOING KNOTS

Debra Reyland was searching for a new parish home last year when she heard Fr. Jim describe St. Leo's ministry. She decided to visit one Sunday and said that she immediately felt an attraction and believed that God had led her here. A music teacher by background, she wanted to share her gifts and began a children's choir. Soon she

realized that the children needed more and with the help of a group of faithful volunteers began the weekly Children's Liturgy of the Word program that reaches up to 50 children during Sunday Mass.

It's her own relationship with God that energizes her ministry with the children. She grew up Protestant and converted to the Catholic faith about 28 years ago. Like some Catholics she struggled with confession.

"But not fully understanding the sacramental blessing it offers us through God's mercy and grace, I rationalized in my mind and in my heart that it was unnecessary. Besides, it would be so uncomfortable like an itchy, wool sweater and would be embarrassing to show my less than perfect and sinful self. What difference would it make really? I confessed my sins to God all the time and that should be enough, I would justify in my mind. But I was missing out on feeling forgiven and having my spirit healed," she said. Last Holy Week she decided to receive the sacrament. "When the priest placed his hands over my head and through Christ absolved me of all my sins, my knots were undone. I had held onto them for so long... unnecessarily. "I am still grateful for that blessing."

She has a favorite picture of Mary which depicts her obedience as untying the knots of sin that began with Eve. "Knots are frustrating, like tangled Christmas lights and tangled necklaces. The tighter you pull away, frustration builds and patience diminishes, the tighter the knot becomes and more impossible it seems to undo. It takes patience to undo knots, turning first this way and then that as little by little progress is made. Although we all know it is better to not get ourselves into a knot in the first place, sometimes they just happen and we need help undoing the mess," she said. "Knots are the opposite of peace. We all need more peace and less knots."

She took her experience with "untying knots" and her devotion to Mary to a recent rosary making project with the children who beaded their own rosaries. "As we built the rosaries, we strategically placed our knots to separate the 'Hail Mary' beads from the 'Our Father' beads. The knots are separators but also help to move the fingers through the decades of the rosary. As I feel the knots in the rosary, I am reminded to not speed past the knots too quickly thinking they are non-essential but instead considering any knots in my personal life that may need to be dealt with, resolved, forgiven, healed," she said.

The children catch her enthusiasm and openness to God. "I like coming to Mass," one boy said. Another is frequently asking his parents to pray. In class and when they come together to pray with the congregation through song, they are becoming more reverent and attentive.

Like their teacher who found her home at St. Leo's, the children are more and more coming home to a deeper relationship with God.

- Angela Anno (compiled from a personal reflection shared by Debra Reyland)

The Knots Prayer

*Dear God,
please untie the knots
that are in my mind,
my heart, and my life.
Remove the have nots,
the can nots and the do nots
that I have in my mind.*

*Erase the will nots,
may nots, might nots
that find a home in my heart.*

*Release me from the could nots,
would nots, and should nots
that obstruct my life.*

*And most of all, Dear God,
I ask that you remove from my mind
my heart and my life all of the 'am nots'
that I have allowed to hold me back,
especially the thought
that I am not good enough. Amen.*

Author known to God

