

## FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Parishioners,

Some of you may have noticed that I wasn't here for the last week in August. I was in Alaska visiting my sister Kim and her family. Truth be told, since I'm not the outdoors type, (preferring plumbing, heating and a.c.) I probably wouldn't have gone to Alaska if my sister didn't live there. And "guilted" me into it. However, I am very glad that I went and I'm happy to report that in the parts of the state I visited, they have the creature comforts mentioned above. Paved roads are another matter.

As my sister lives in Anchorage, we spent a couple days there and frankly it looks much like any other American city. However, on the way to the airport on the day we were leaving we saw a large moose and her calf on the median strip of the highway. Now that's something you don't normally see on the Beltway, thank God! Having to avoid the deer around here is bad enough.

We also spent two days in the town of Seward, which is on the southern coast of Alaska. From there we took a six hour boat trip along the shore to see the wildlife. And there was plenty to see. We saw whales, sea lions, otters, and several different types of bird, including bald eagles. (Funny how with eagles baldness is considered a mark of distinction.)

Traveling north from Seward we stopped at a nature reserve where we were able to see several more types of animals up close. Most of the animals there could no longer function in the wild. For example, there were both black and brown bears there who were orphaned before they were able to learn how to be bears in the wild. There were also elk, moose and caribou. My four year old niece, perhaps because she's used to seeing these bigger beasts strolling Alaska's highways, was particularly fascinated by a porcupine. If we didn't stop her she would have tried to pet it.

While seeing all these different creatures was fun, the highlight of the trip for me, apart from visiting with the other animals in my family of course, was our visit to Mount McKinley. At 20,000 feet, McKinley is the highest peak in the U.S. We stayed in a cabin about sixty miles from McKinley but even at that distance it is enormous. We were very fortunate that one of the days we were there it was quite clear and spent a lot of time just looking at the mountain and taking in its beauty. I was able to offer a Mass while facing this magnificent range which made it very easy to praise and glorify God for His wonderful works.

So, if you ever get the chance to go to Alaska, even if you don't have any relatives living there, I'd recommend it. Mind you, Fall starts in August there and the snow comes with October. Perhaps some day, when I get up my nerve, I'll go to Alaska in the winter to get the full effect.

With my prayers,

Fr. Conley