

“RULES OF THE ROAD”: RUNNERS, BICYCLES AND THE RIGHT OF WAY

Last Sunday’s homily included a call to a “complaint free” Monday. I earnestly endeavored to comply with my own challenge. Whether writing one’s column (my usual Monday routine) qualifies as a complaint free zone is a matter of dispute. After all, I am not complaining actively to anyone, and the article only appears the following Sunday. That said, the annual Twin City Marathon week is the perfect opportunity to opine about the ever-changing **rules of the road** as they apply to city life in 2021. Truthfully, I am **delighted** for the return of the TC Marathon after a year’s absence! It **adds life** to the neighborhood, even while admitting the difficulty of accessing the parking lot for Sunday morning Masses. That said, I feel a need to vent a bit about changing habits and patterns on the road, as hopefully we all try to “get along” and share the spaces.

I have previously railed about the **Ayd Mill Road** re-do. Enough said. I recently made an early Saturday morning run to bring groceries to my mother. While returning to the Cathedral via St. Clair Ave., I encountered an early morning **bicyclist** at a cross street. As I glanced in my rearview mirror, no one was behind me, nor was anyone coming the other direction. So, I slowed down and motioned for him to cross. To my surprise, he immediately and quite dramatically waved me off, and motioned (somewhat like a police motorcycle in a funeral procession!) to continue. As I passed him by, I pulled over and opened my window, “Do you have a moment to talk?” He nodded yes, and rode up to the driver’s side window, looking perturbed. “This should be interesting,” I thought. But I couldn’t let it go!

“Sir, may I just say that I actually think we are more or less on the same page.” He disagreed, and I knew what was next. “The problem is people do not follow the rules...I was **not** at a crosswalk; you should **not** have **stopped** for me.” (He was in the street) After asking his name, I replied, “Craig, you are 100% correct—please allow me a moment to explain. I shared that there are several issues, the first being that the crosswalks are so **faded**, it is nearly **impossible** to tell which corners have crosswalks and which do not. Secondly, I have been driving when the car in front of me slowed down to let people cross who were still a **decent distance** away from the curb. When this occurs, it actually endangers people, because you **never know** when someone may quickly come to a stop when seeing owners walking their dog.

I have also received **dirty looks** when failing to slow down to let people cross, even absent a cross walk. Dirty looks either way! I’m hopelessly confused. Finally, how many times have I driven down Summit only to come upon runners (early morning when it is dark) running shoulder to shoulder far into the street, not limiting themselves to the running/bike lane? I have slowed to 15 mph, waiting for them to “hear” a car coming, so that they may move to the side. Here is the inconvenient truth—there are rules of the road. However, when so many routinely ignore or are confused about the rules, we have **chaos**. At some point, we “rule followers” give up. **So, what are the precise rules?** I accessed online the **Minnesota Driver’s Manual**. On page 43, (“Watch for Pedestrians”) it states: “Yield the right-of-way to pedestrians crossing at intersections and cross-walks.”

From this, I inferred that it is **irrelevant** whether the crosswalk is painted. That was news to me; I had thought there was a distinction. Wrong! An online resource entitled “Saint Paul *Rules of the Road*,” notes: “Stop for pedestrians – the law applies to all street corners, for both marked and unmarked crosswalks (all street corners). Every corner is a crosswalk.” I called City Hall and was told unequivocally that yes, drivers must allow people to cross at **all intersections**, regardless of

markings. “So, what is the purpose of the painted lines?” I asked. Dead silence. Finally, pedestrians **may cross mid-block** between adjacent intersections (though here they yield to cars!), if it lacks stop lights, at which point pedestrians shall not cross at any place except in a marked crosswalk. No more jaywalking?

Exasperated, I called the **Minnesota Safety Council**. The woman with whom I spoke could not have been more understanding, keenly aware of the challenges of interpreting the law, acknowledging its ambiguities. Indeed, **some states do distinguish** between marked and unmarked crosswalks, or only require the driver to yield if the pedestrian is on their side of the road. Is your head spinning yet? She encouraged me to call MnDOT and register my concern. This was not the proverbial run around; she said that MnDOT needs to hear from citizens. Count me in! Look, I am a rule follower– always have been, always will. In the past five years, there have been more than 2,500 pedestrian crashes in the Twin Cities– 402 involving children! I sincerely desire to **share the road** safely with pedestrians and bicyclists, sans “attitude” or a chip on my shoulder. Please just **clarify** the rules. And finally, would someone **paint** the faded **crosswalks**? I’ll even donate the first gallon!

- Recent Letters to the Editor of the *Pioneer Press* are revealing, as more people are noting the obvious security challenges we face in this city. We are on pace (30 to date) to exceed the record number of murders (34) in all of 2020. St. Paul is on pace (30 to date) to exceed the record number of murders (34) in all of 2020; Minneapolis has had 73! Nationwide, some 5,000 more Americans were murdered last year than in 2019– a figure larger than the U.S. death toll in the entire Iraq War.
- **University of Minnesota** researchers are conducting a traffic **safety study**, using 32 Twin Cities intersections. To date, only 35% of drivers complied with stopping for pedestrians, while 54% complied in St. Paul! I’ll surely be on the lookout now!
- “Seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you; pray for it to the LORD, for upon its welfare your own depends.” Jeremiah 29:7
- Calling all Knights! We are hosting an evening for current and prospective **Knights of Columbus** on Monday, October 11. Food and fellowship await, beginning at 5:30 p.m. in the Cathedral courtyard.
- The body of Servant of God **Emil Kapaun** was recently interred in the Cathedral in Wichita, KS. The remains of the diocesan **priest** who died at age 35 in a North Korean prison camp in 1951 were only positively **identified** earlier this year. He had previously been buried with “unknown” soldiers in Hawaii. This latest step signals the real possibility of the continuation of his cause towards sainthood.
- Cathedral parishioners have been well-represented in the Synod Small Group videos. Whether sharing a teaching on the Kerygma (Session 1) or seeing one of our new lectors serve as “M.C.” this week, I am proud that our Cathedral parishioners have stepped up to help. It is **not too late** to join a group. The Session 3 topic is “Forming parishes in the service of evangelization.” The sub-topics are (1) life-long formation and (2) the universal call to holiness.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector