

TURN THE PAGE

Two weeks ago at the 8:30 Mass, I was proclaiming the Gospel, and I thought it was going pretty well. I was giving emphasis to all the right words, and I was projecting my voice. When I came to the end of the page, I looked up and said "The Gospel of the Lord" and I turned toward the altar. Then I noticed a puzzled look on Fr. Jim's face, as he hesitated to join me. When we were side by side, he whispered to me "what about the rest of the Gospel? I whispered back, shall I finish? He whispered again "I need it for my homily". So I went back to the ambo, turned the page, and finished proclaiming the Gospel.

What can I tell you--ministry is a font of humility, and any good teacher will tell you that repetition is how we learn the best. *Boy, am I learning fast!* When I joined Father Jim again at the altar I whispered to him. "This could make a good homily".

Now, I really hate it when I interrupt the flow of liturgy, but I had been struggling mightily for a way to begin this homily, and I was so grateful for the inspiration, that I spent the rest of the Mass praying; Thank you Jesus, Thank you Jesus, Thank you Jesus. I am lucky that I didn't mess up the dismissal.

TURN THE PAGE! I heard the message loud and clear. It is only when you turn the page that you get to the part where God heals the faithful.

The apostles had been taught by Jesus for some time now, and it was time for them to turn the page in their life and begin their healing ministry to the gentiles. The apostles were sent two by two, and Jesus instructed them to take nothing for the journey. I suppose, in a way, it was a type of witness protection program. They would do the witnessing, and God would provide for their protection. I am sure that it also kept them humble, as they had to rely upon the gentiles for food and shelter.

To get the full meaning of the Gospel we too must turn the page--this time, to the book of Exodus. God will protect the apostles as he protected Israel from the Egyptians at the Red Sea. He will give them food as he gave them bread from heaven, in the form of manna. He will give them drink as he gave Israel water from the rock. God will sustain them on their mission in every way. Just as He taught Israel in the Sinai desert, He will teach His apostles to trust in God and not in any power that they possess.

This first sending of the apostles is the beginning of the New Exodus. In the Book of Numbers, God took some of the spirit that was upon Moses, gave it to the seventy elders, and sent them on their way. Now Jesus is giving His apostles power to heal unclean spirits as He sends them to the nations.

If we turn the page of our Bible to the end of the Gospel of John, we will see the apostles receiving the fullness of that power, as the resurrected Jesus breathes on them saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit". Jesus is preparing the apostles for the day when they will lead the mission of His Church. God prepares a minister for service like the local hardware man cuts a key. After all of the useless material is cut away, the key fits perfectly into the lock. When the key is turned the door will open.

Jesus warns the apostles that wherever they are accepted, they should remain, but wherever they are rejected, they should abandon that town or village. They were to perform the prophetic action of shaking the dust off their sandals. That action anticipates the judgment of God upon those that do not receive Him. This reaction may seem extreme, but remember that rejection, in this time, is not just a polite unwillingness to listen, but an active persecution and even murder.

If we turn the page again to the Gospel of Mark, we will be reminded of the bad soil in the "Parable of the Sower", which would not allow the Word to bear fruit. God himself will see to them on the day of judgment, when the very dust will cry out "as a witness against them".

So how about you? You have been baptized into Christ, You have received the gift of the Holy Spirit at your confirmation. You have been well fed at the table of the Lord, and you have received the very life's blood of Jesus. As we heard in the letter to the Ephesians, "You have been given every spiritual blessing in the heavens". To receive His blessings is to take responsibility to use them for the good of others. His gifts are given to share. So how about it, is it time for you to turn the page in your life and begin your healing ministry?

God has given us a desire that we all hold dear. A desire to become part of something bigger than ourselves. As we contemplate our exodus from this earth, we need to know that we have made a difference in the lives of those around us. This desire is a God given grace prompting us to join the mission of the apostles through Jesus Christ. We should take a cue from the last recorded words of Mary as she spoke to the servants at Cana. She said, "Do whatever he tells you". So what is Jesus telling you today?

If you have a lot of money, you may donate to a worthy cause, or have a public building named after you. If that is you, Father Jim and I will be at the back of the church after Mass to accept your check on behalf of the parish. Giving of our wealth with charity to others is a duty of all Christians.

But, there is a more excellent way. When you bring someone to Christ by the giving of your life, you can make an eternal difference both in their life, and in yours. Again from Ephesians; "We are to become holy and blameless in His sight". The way we become holy and blameless is to give not just from our pocketbook, but to give of our life. By His life, Jesus showed us the way; all we have to do is follow His example.

The most common response to this call to mission is "I am not worthy". It is true that only the humble can receive the Word, because it is more about God than it about us. But, false humility can become a pair of spiritual handcuffs, and that can make it difficult for us to see the plan that God has for us.

Some of the most important missions of the church may not even seem like work. Remember that Jesus said that "My yoke is easy and the burden is light". Many of us become Mom and Dad, and do our best to pass on faith to our children. Do not underestimate the eternal value of this vocation. Without an active domestic church, we could lose our faith in a generation. The church depends upon the service of holy parents who take the Vocation of Marriage as it truly is--a sacrament of service. Parents are the first teachers of our faith, and the best way to teach our children about service is by our example.

Frankly, we need to do a better job of teaching our children the faith. Did you know that only 24% of Catholics attend church regularly. Many of them think they do not need church to be a spiritual person. These are our sons and daughters. They do not get that God has chosen to give His gifts through the sacraments of the Church. And that Church is where we go to experience God in the Eucharistic Celebration and in the community.

As the writer of "Cool Hand Luke" said, "What we have here is a failure to communicate". We must teach our children that without a relationship to others, we cannot know who we are, or even what we were created for. Without the Church, our experience of God may remain just a nice idea, and not about our Father who is madly in love with all of His children.

So what about you? What is your story? God has inspired your story through the sacraments of His church. Are you satisfied with what you have written so far in your book of life? What about the end of your story? Remember, it is only when you turn the page that you get to the part where God heals the faithful. Come prepared to be humbled. God's plan for us is so great that we only dare to grasp it with humility.

Deacon Alan Christy